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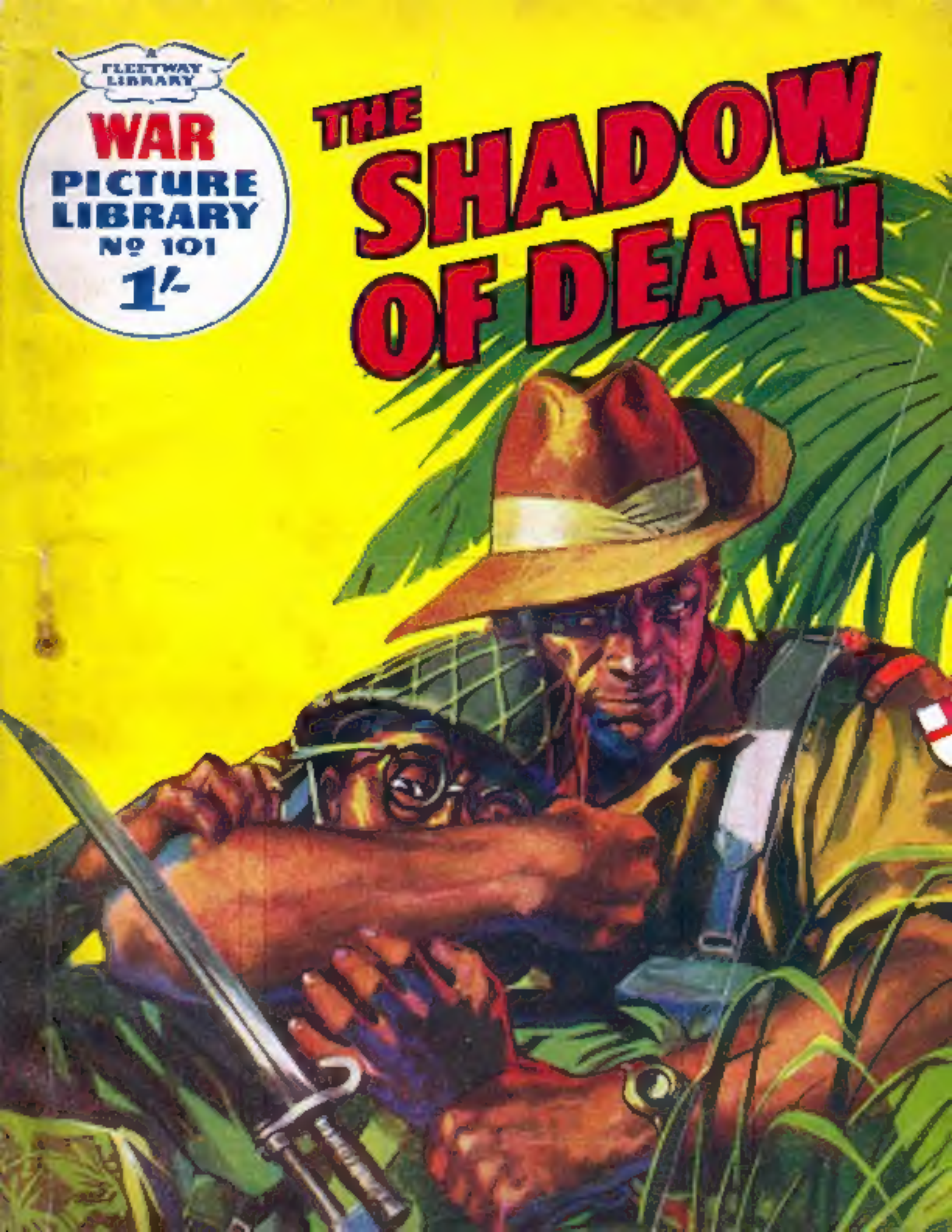
THE SHADOW OF DEATH



4 ALL-ACTION ISSUES EVERY MONTH

★ No. 13 **BATTLE ORDER**
When the "Tigers" roar, even courage is not enough !

★ No. 14 **THE QUICK—AND THE DEAD**
They gave him a gun—and made him a killer !

★ No. 15 **STAND UP AND FIGHT**
They reached breaking point—on the bloodsoaked road to Mandalay !

★ No. 16 **L.C.I. 159**
The empty landing craft drifted out of the dawn, a dead German at the helm !

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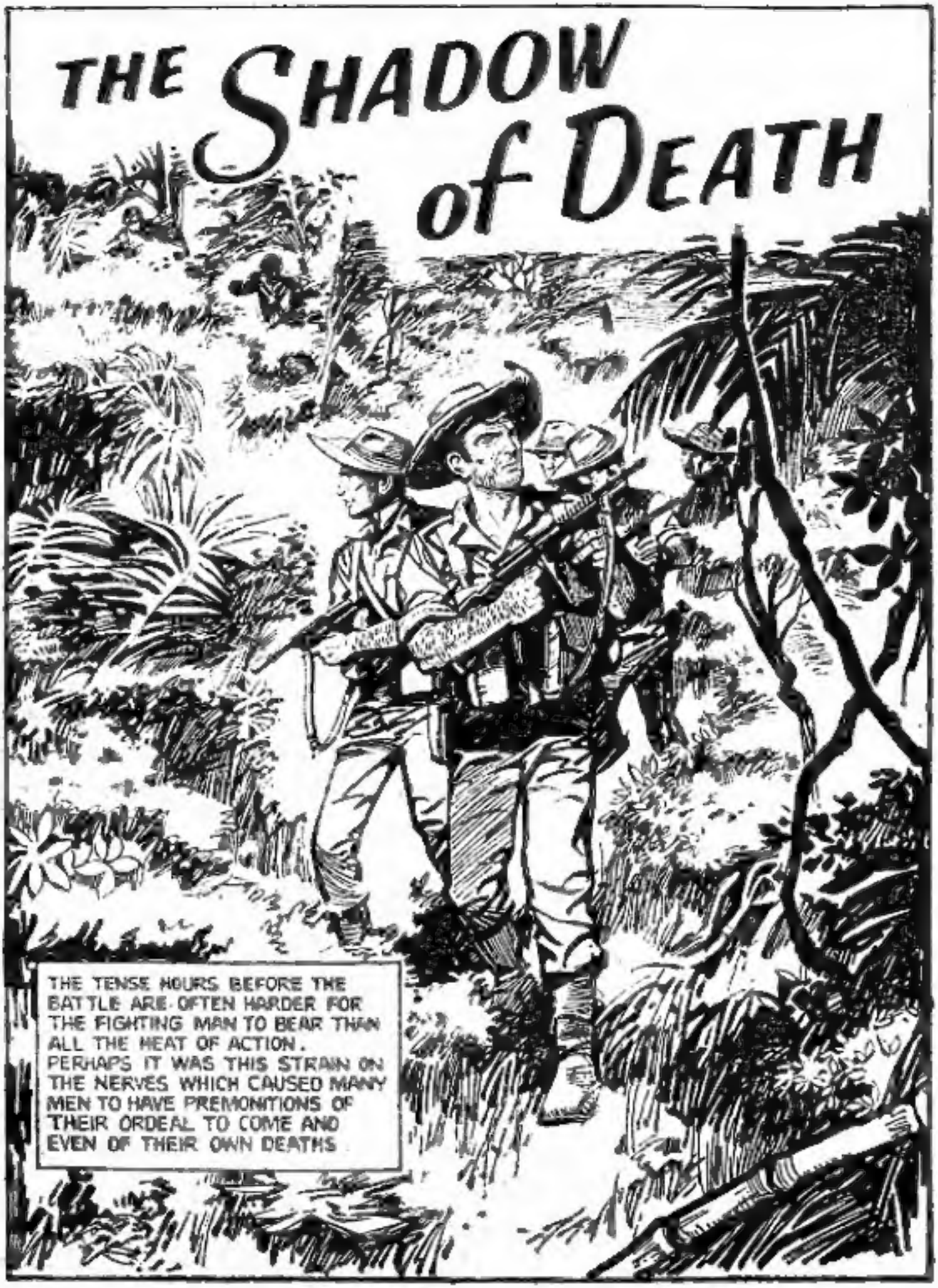
THE SHADOW of DEATH



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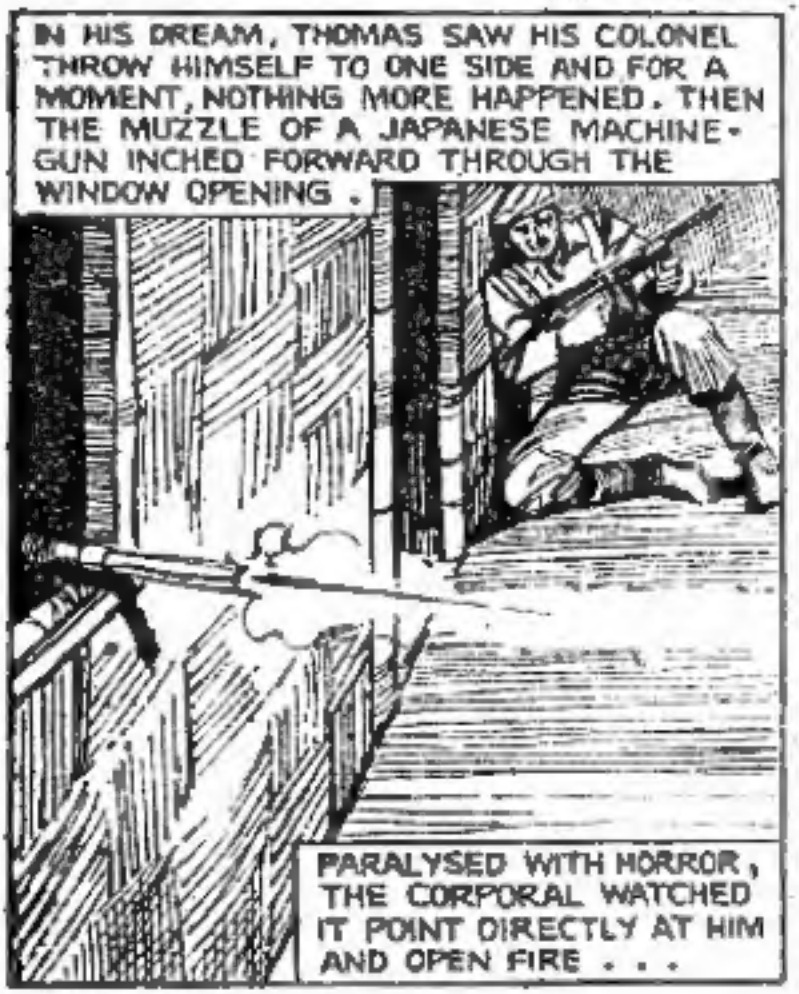
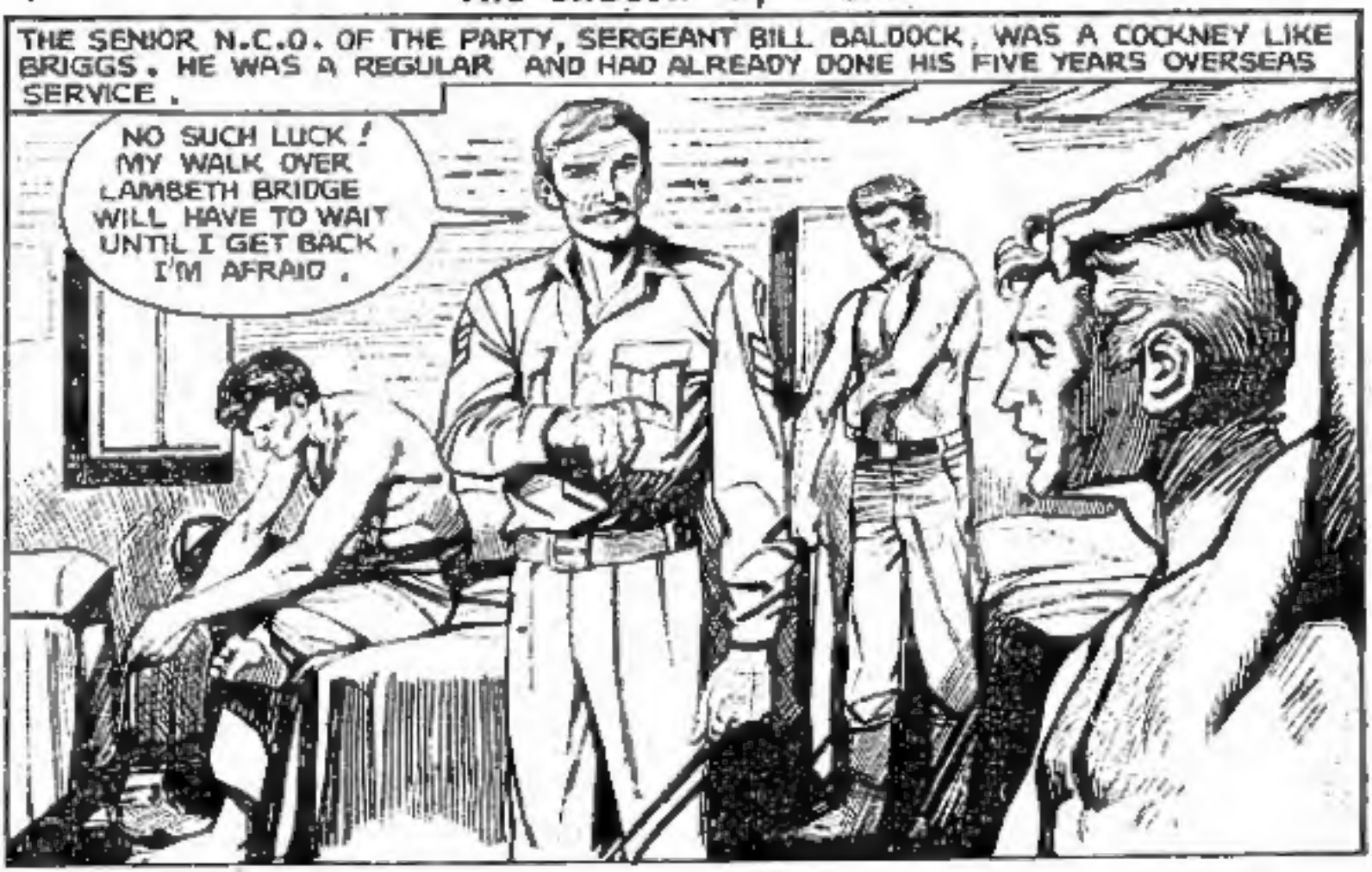
Chapter 1. Strange Forebodings


IN HIS DREAM, THOMAS SAW HIS COLONEL THROW HIMSELF TO ONE SIDE AND FOR A MOMENT, NOTHING MORE HAPPENED. THEN THE MUZZLE OF A JAPANESE MACHINE-GUN INCHED FORWARD THROUGH THE WINDOW OPENING.
PARALYSED WITH HORROR, THE CORPORAL WATCHED IT POINT DIRECTLY AT HIM AND OPEN FIRE . . .

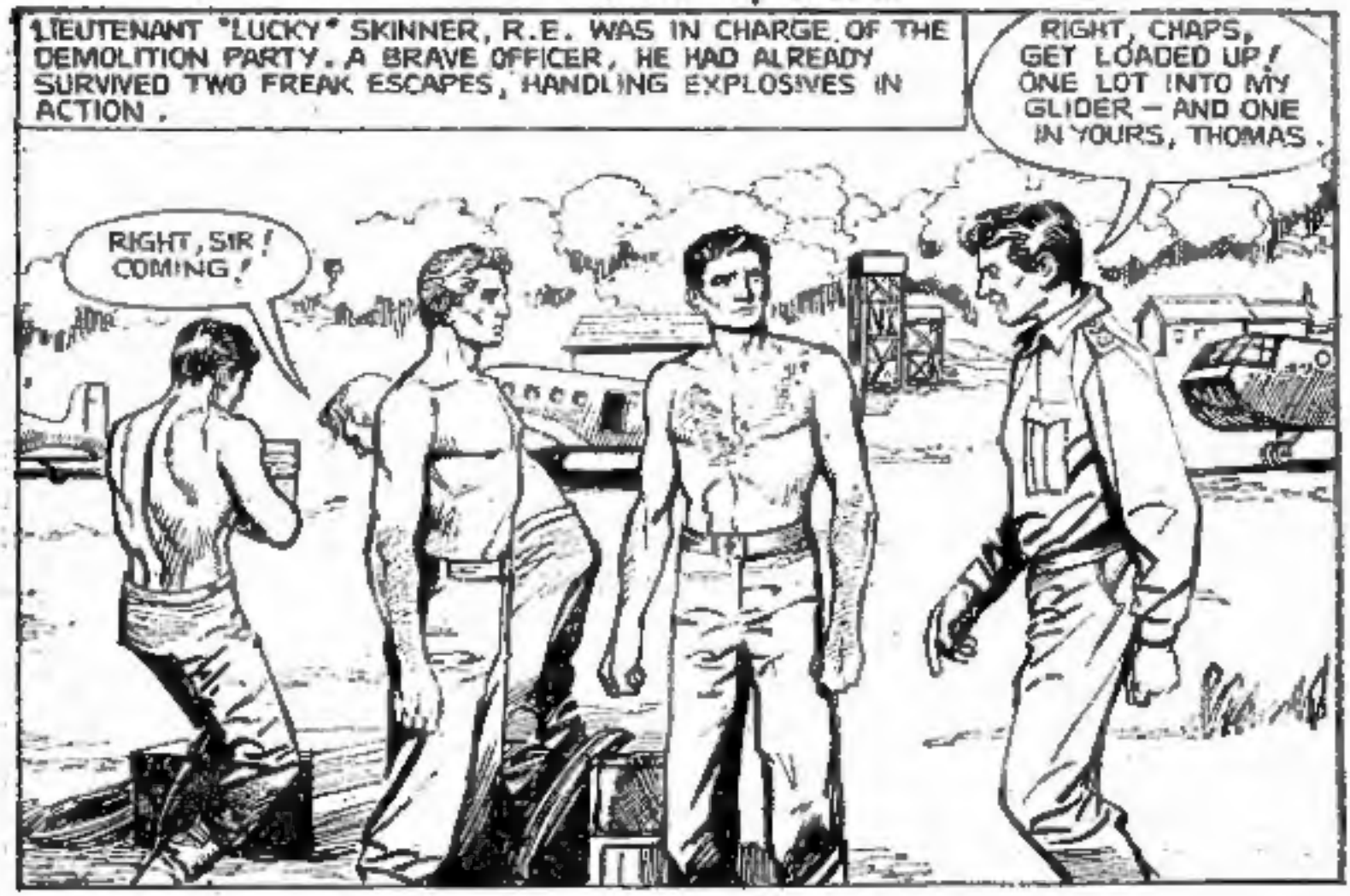
AAAAAAAAA..!

CORPORAL DAVID THOMAS SUDDENLY AWOKE, DRENCHED IN PERSPIRATION, THE HORROR OF HIS NIGHTMARE STILL FRESH IN HIS MIND.
WAKEY, WAKEY— YOU DOZY SAPPERS! COME ON, BRIGGS, THERE'S A LOT TO DO!
HAVE A HEART, SERGEANT! ANYWAY, I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOIN' ON LEAVE.

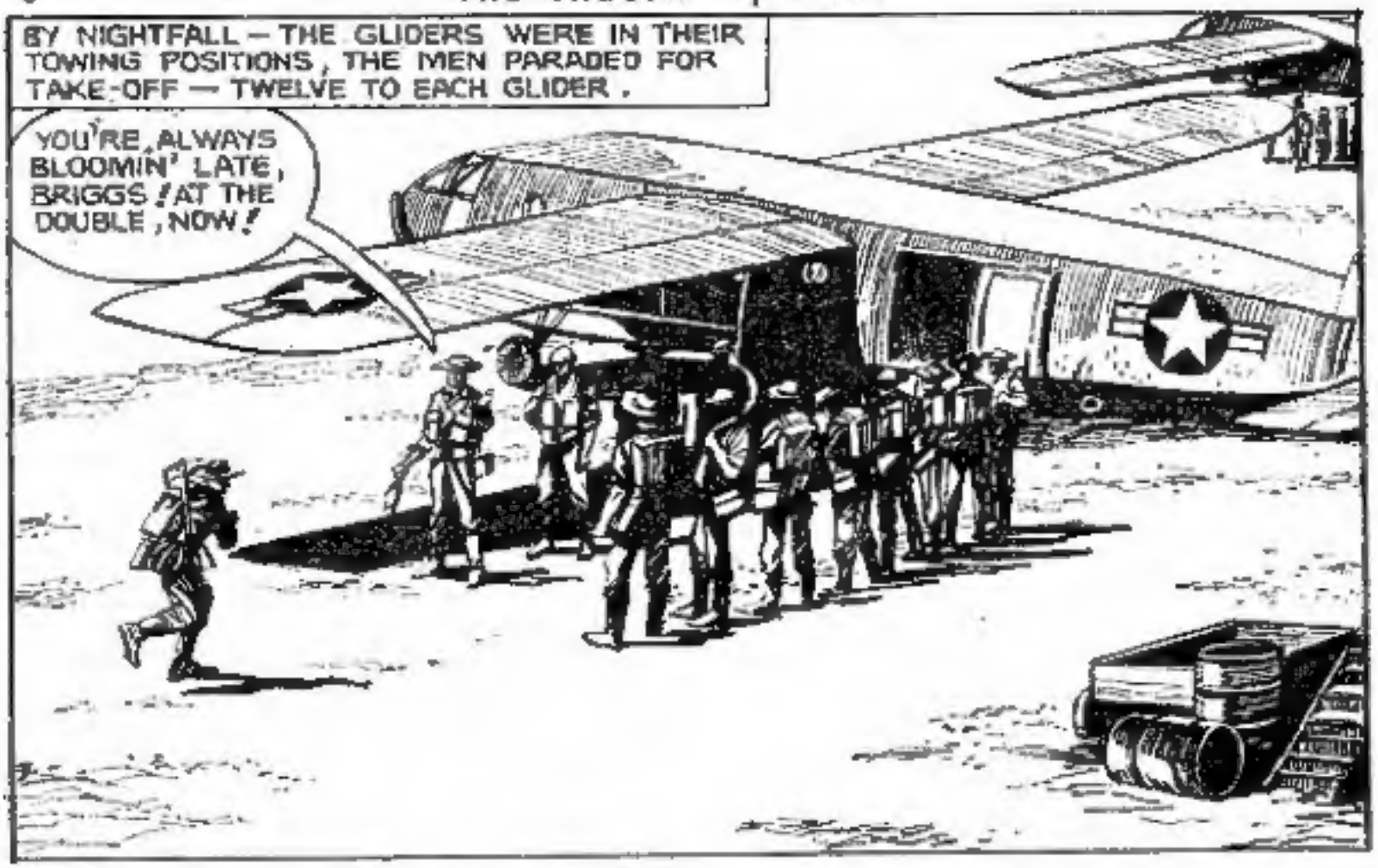

THE SENIOR N.C.O. OF THE PARTY, SERGEANT BILL BALDOCK, WAS A COCKNEY LIKE BRIGGS. HE WAS A REGULAR AND HAD ALREADY DONE HIS FIVE YEARS OVERSEAS SERVICE.
NO SUCH LUCK! MY WALK OVER LAMBETH BRIDGE WILL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL I GET BACK, I'M AFRAID.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE RAID WENT ON AND CORPORAL THOMAS HAD HIS SAPPERS CHECK AND RECHECK THE DEMOLITION EQUIPMENT.
...AND THE OTHER EXPLODER. THAT'S TWO OF EVERYTHING! YOU KNOW, BRIGGSY — I'VE A FUNNY FEELING ABOUT THIS TRIP!
EXPLOSIVES

HE CONFIDED HIS OMINOUS DREAM TO SAPPER BRIGGS...
FRANKLY, BRIGGSY, I DON'T LIKE IT.
YOU'RE TOO CAREFUL TO LET A JAP SHOOT YOU, CORP. IT'S FUNNY — I 'AD A DREAM, TOO — 'AD A ROPE ROUND ME NECK! I ASK YER NOW, COULD THAT HAPPEN? WE'RE ALL JUMPY, I GUESS.


LIEUTENANT "LUCKY" SKINNER, R.E. WAS IN CHARGE OF THE DEMOLITION PARTY. A BRAVE OFFICER, HE HAD ALREADY SURVIVED TWO FREAK ESCAPES, HANDLING EXPLOSIVES IN ACTION.
RIGHT, CHAPS, GET LOADED UP! ONE LOT INTO MY GLIDER — AND ONE IN YOURS, THOMAS.
RIGHT, SIR! COMING!

MAJOR BRODIE, THE SENIOR OF THE TWO GLIDER PILOTS, MET THEM BY THE WACO GLIDER.
CORPORAL THOMAS, SIR, IS GOING WITH YOU, THE COLONEL AND BALDOCK. TAKE GOOD CARE OF HIM, SIR — I DEPEND ON HIS THOROUGHNESS.
LEAVE HIM TO ME, SKINNER. ALL LOADED UP, THEN?


BY NIGHTFALL — THE GLIDERS WERE IN THEIR TOWING POSITIONS, THE MEN PARADED FOR TAKE-OFF — TWELVE TO EACH GLIDER.
YOU'RE ALWAYS BLOOMIN' LATE, BRIGGS! AT THE DOUBLE, NOW!

FRETTING WITH TENSION, THEY WAITED FOR THEIR LEADER.
MAJOR BRODIE, SIR, SHALL I LOOK FOR THE C.O.?
THREE MINUTES LATE ALREADY! NO, SERGEANT, COLONEL MACGORE CHOOSES HIS OWN TIME...

MAJOR BRODIE KNEW THE SERGEANT WELL ENOUGH TO BE FRANK...
YOU KNOW, BALDOCK, HE TOLD ME HE'D PICKED TONIGHT FOR THE RAID BECAUSE IT WAS A LUCKY DAY! AN UNPREDICTABLE MAN, THE COLONEL, BUT A BORN LEADER, IF EVER I MET ONE.
I THINK I HEAR THEM COMING, SIR!

COLONEL JASON MACGORE HIMSELF HAD BEEN GOING INTO FINAL DETAILS WITH GENERAL SIR HORACE WATKINS .
– AND THEN LAND ON THE RIVER SANDBANK . VERY WELL, JASON – BUT ARE YOU WISE NOT TO TELL THE OTHERS THE FULL DETAILS YET ?
THERE'LL BE TIME ENOUGH, SIR, WHILE I'M STILL WITH THEM!

THE GENERAL SHRUGGED – THERE WAS LITTLE PROFIT IN ARGUING WITH MACGORE .
WELL, THE WHOLE OPERATION WAS YOUR IDEA . I WON'T INTERFERE . . BE IT ON YOUR OWN HEAD THEN!
ON MY OWN HEAD IT WILL BE, SIR!

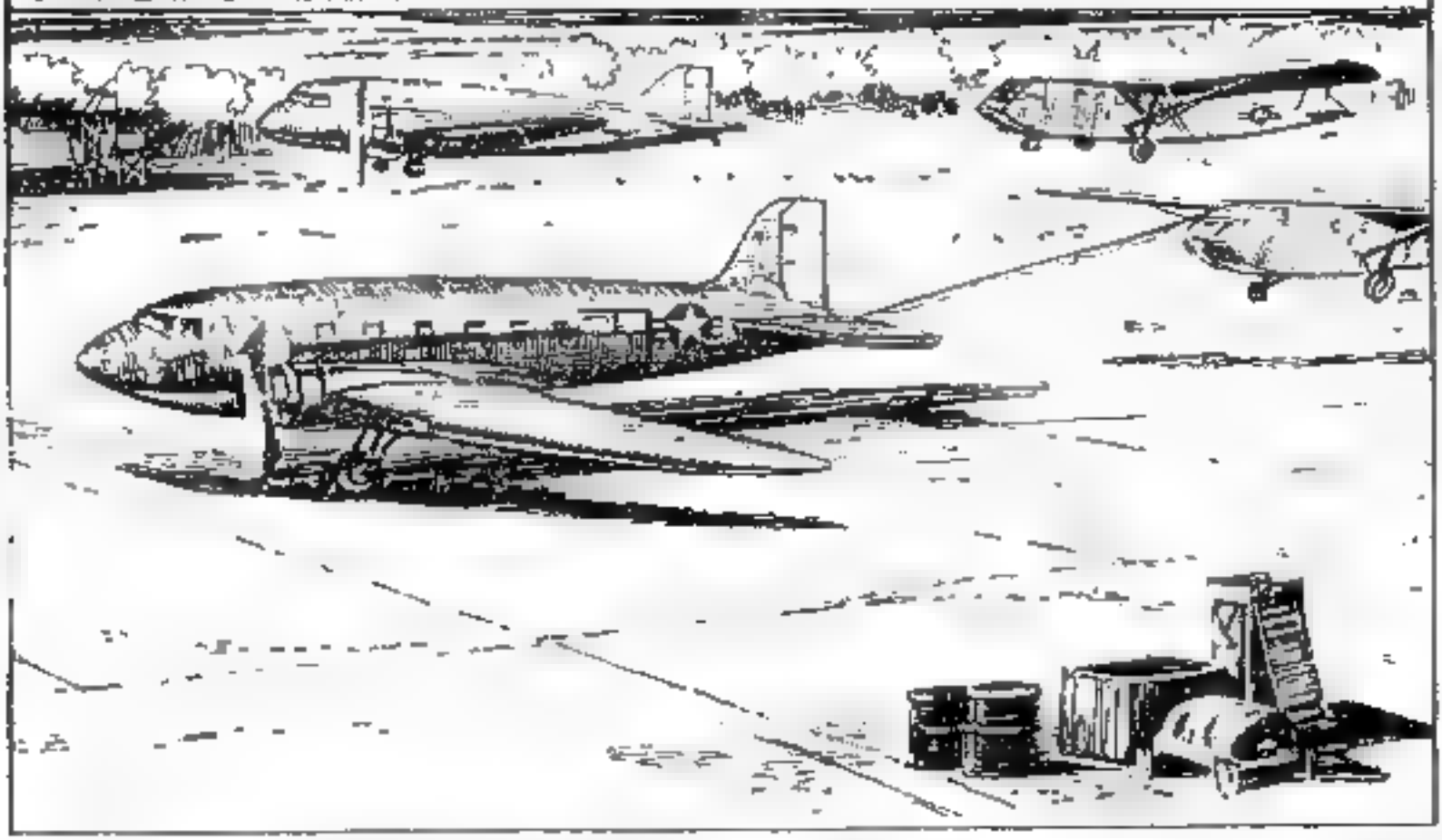
ACCOMPANIED BY GENERAL WATKINS, THE COLONEL STRODE ACROSS THE AIRSTRIP.
THANK THE STARS, AT LAST! SERGEANT BALDOCK! BRING THE PARTY TO ATTENTION!
VERY GOOD, SIR!

AS THE MEN FILED IN, TO THE ROAR OF THE TWO DAKOTAS REVVING UP, LIEUTENANT SKINNER CAME UP TO COLONEL MACGORE.
EXCUSE ME, SIR! BUT WE HAVEN'T DECIDED HOW WE WILL SPLIT UP THE DEMOLITION STORES ON THE MARCH.
GOOD, I'M GLAD YOU REMINDED ME, SKINNER... LOOK, CHANGE GLIDERS AND COME WITH ME. WE'LL TALK ABOUT IT.

BUT THAT MEANS ALL THE SAPPERS TOGETHER, SIR! SUPPOSING ONE GLIDER . . ?
WHAT WILL BE, WILL BE!

INSIDE THE WACO, MACGORE SAT HUNCHED AND SILENT AS THE PILOT WAITED FOR THE SIGNAL FROM THE TUG .
WE'LL BE ALL RIGHT WITH YOU, SIR . . . YOU'RE ALWAYS LUCKY.

THE THUNDEROUS DAKOTAS WERE STRAINING AGAINST THEIR BRAKES AS THE PILOTS STEPPED UP THE POWER. THEY ROLLED FORWARD AND SOON THE GLIDERS WERE LIFTING INTO THE AIR.

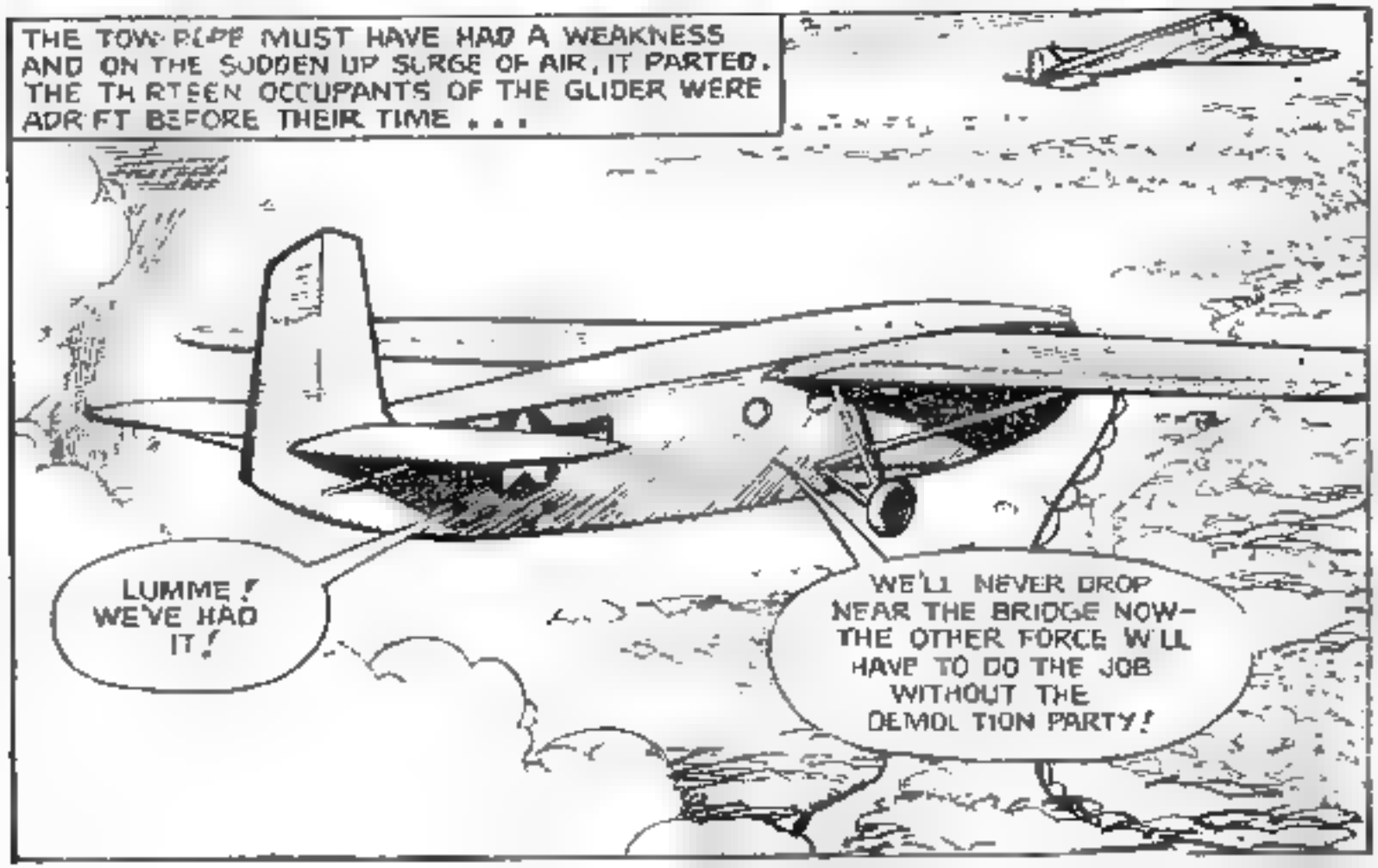


THEY DRONED ON THROUGH THE NIGHT AND AT FIRST THE MEN WERE SILENT. WHEN TALK BEGAN, IT TURNED TO THE SUBJECT OF DREAMS . . .

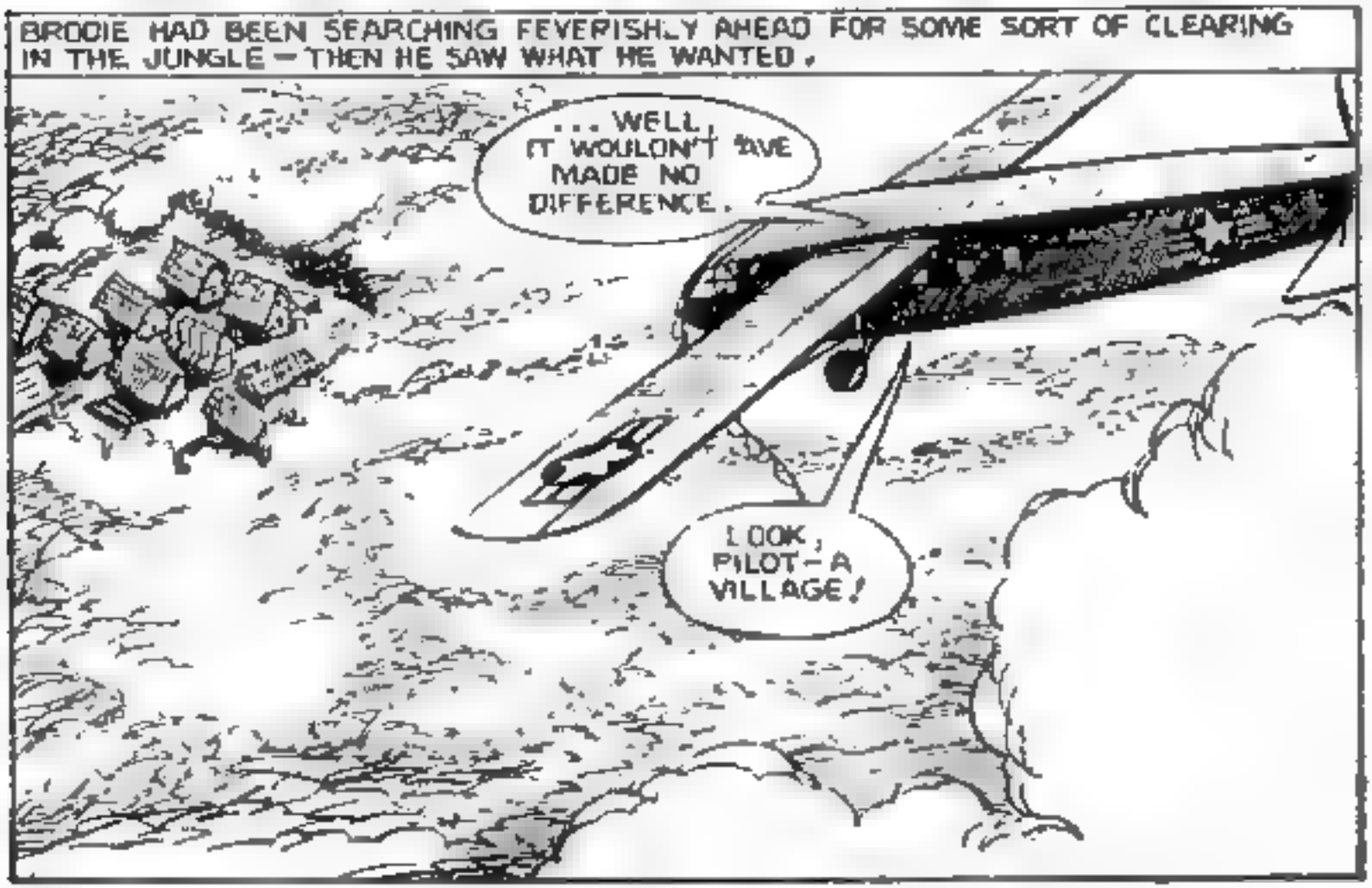
THE COLONEL TOOK NO PART IN THE CONVERSATION — JUST SAT STARING MOODILY INTO THE DIMNESS OF THE BOXLIKE FUSELAGE.

THE GLIDER BUMPED UNSTEADILY IN THE POCKETS OF AIR OVER THE JUNGLE-CLAD HILLS - THEY WERE OVER ENEMY-HELD COUNTRY.
SHOULD BE JUST OVER THE NEXT RIDGE...YES BY HARRY! THERE'S THE RIVER!

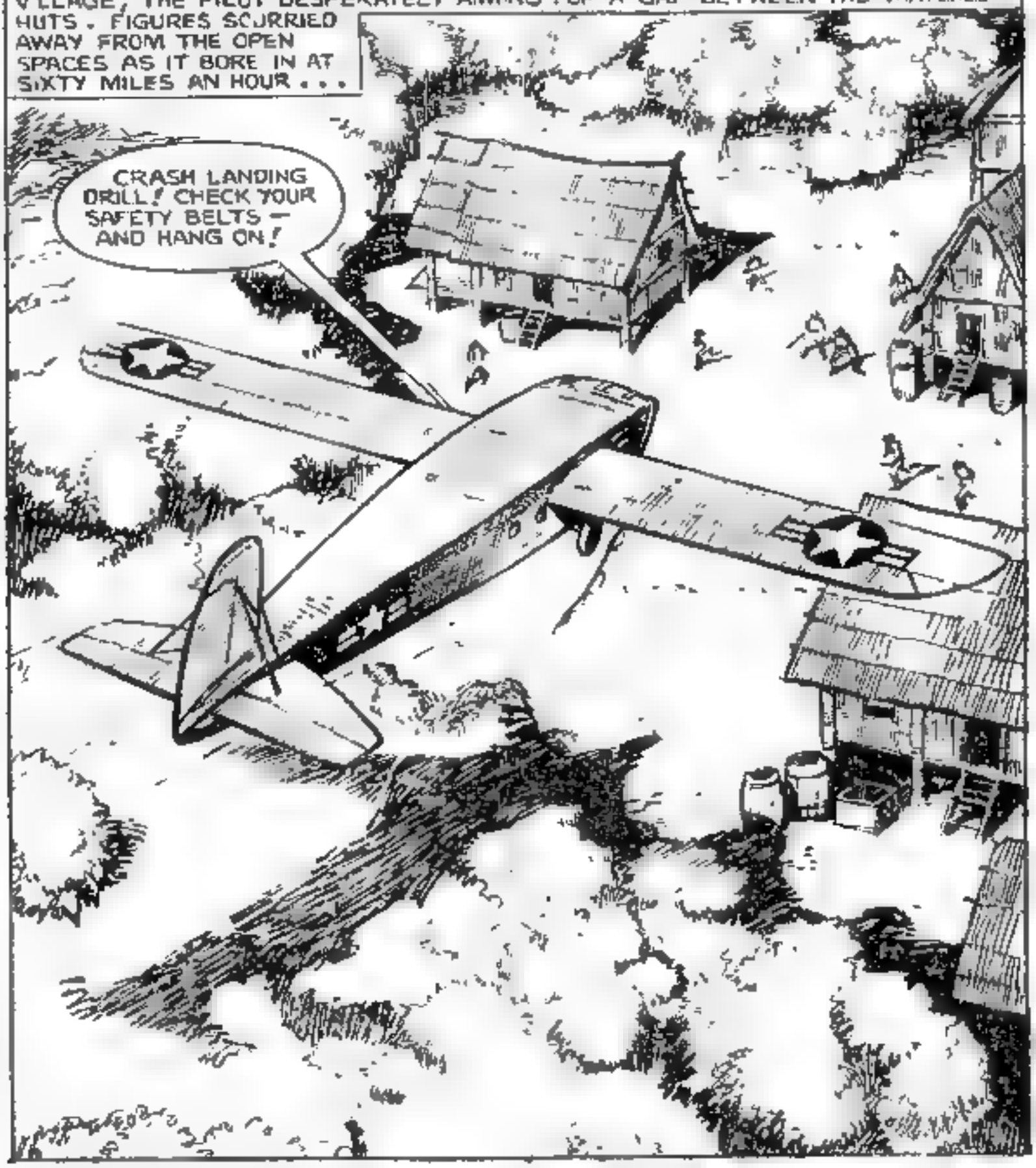
BUT EVEN AS MAJOR BRODIE SPOKE THE GLIDER GAVE A WILD LURCH . . .
HECK — WHAT WAS THAT?
THE TOW-ROPE — IT'S PARTED!


THE TOW-ROPE MUST HAVE HAD A WEAKNESS AND ON THE SUDDEN UP SURGE OF AIR, IT PARTED. THE THIRTEEN OCCUPANTS OF THE GLIDER WERE ADRIFT BEFORE THEIR TIME . . .
LUMME! WE'VE HAD IT!
WE'LL NEVER DROP NEAR THE BRIDGE NOW— THE OTHER FORCE WILL HAVE TO DO THE JOB WITHOUT THE DEMOLITION PARTY!

THE GLIDER WAS LOSING HEIGHT RAPIDLY AND THE SENSATION BROUGHT BACK TO BRIGGS THE SICK MEMORY OF HIS DREAM.
THE ROPE - THE ROPE ROUND ME NECK - BROKE.. AND I WAS FALLIN' DOWN, EVER SO SLOW, SOMETHING LIKE THIS...
THIS IS A FINE TIME TO REMEMBER!


BRODIE HAD BEEN SEARCHING FEVERISHLY AHEAD FOR SOME SORT OF CLEARING IN THE JUNGLE - THEN HE SAW WHAT HE WANTED.
... WELL, IT WOULDN'T 'AVE MADE NO DIFFERENCE.
LOOK, PILOT - A VILLAGE!

Chapter 2. Crash Landing



SUDDENLY, MACGORE RECOGNISED THE FIGURES IN THE FAST APPROACHING VILLAGE AND THERE WAS A HINT OF PANIC IN HIS SHOUT.

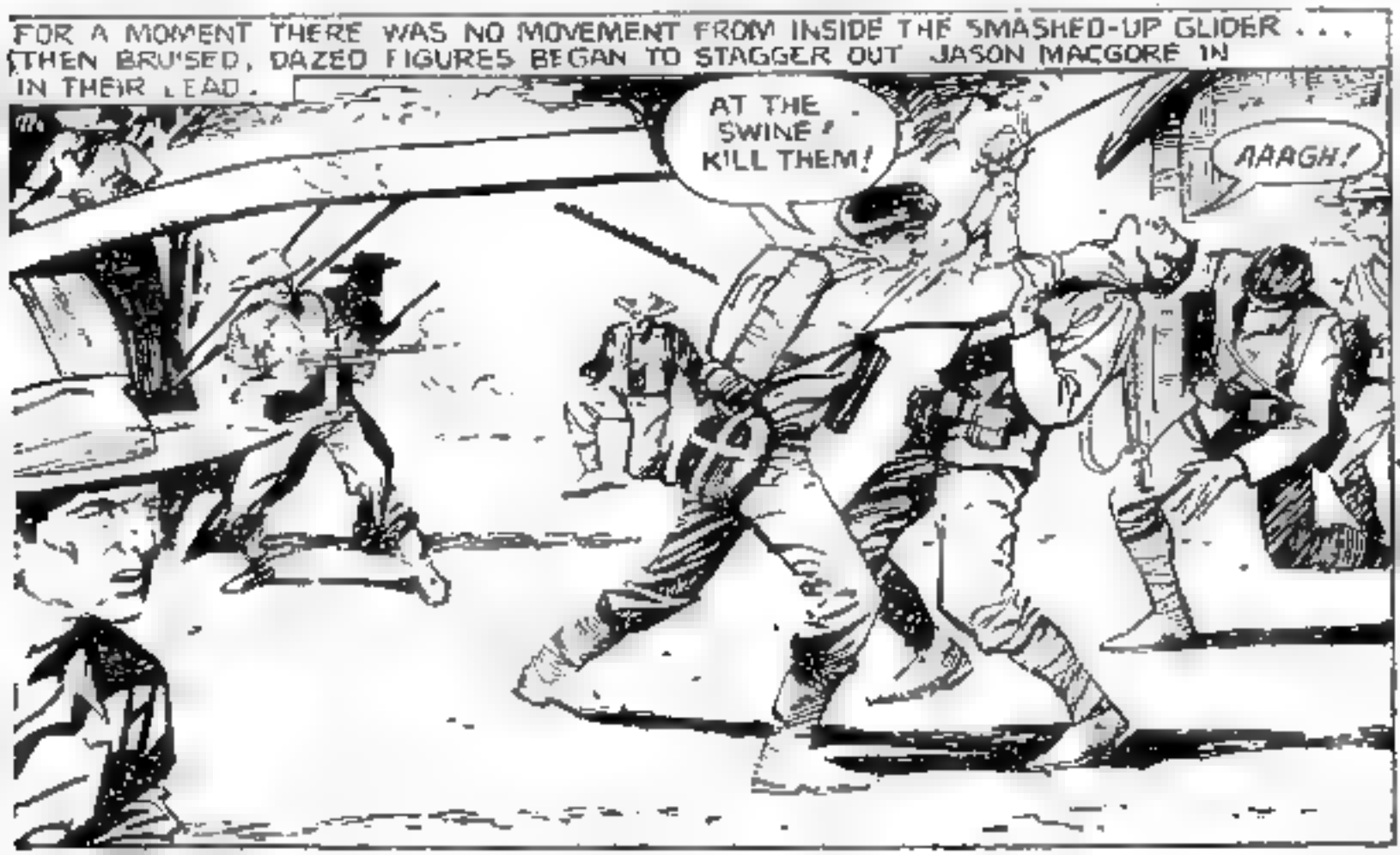
JAPS! GREAT HEAVENS! IT'S DISASTER DISASTER!

HOLD TIGHT!

THE GLIDER LEVELLED OUT . . . THEN WENT RIPPING AND PLOUGHING AT A PERILOUS SPEED THROUGH THE RUSH HUTS.

QUICKLY – QUICKLY! KILL THE WHITE DEVILS!

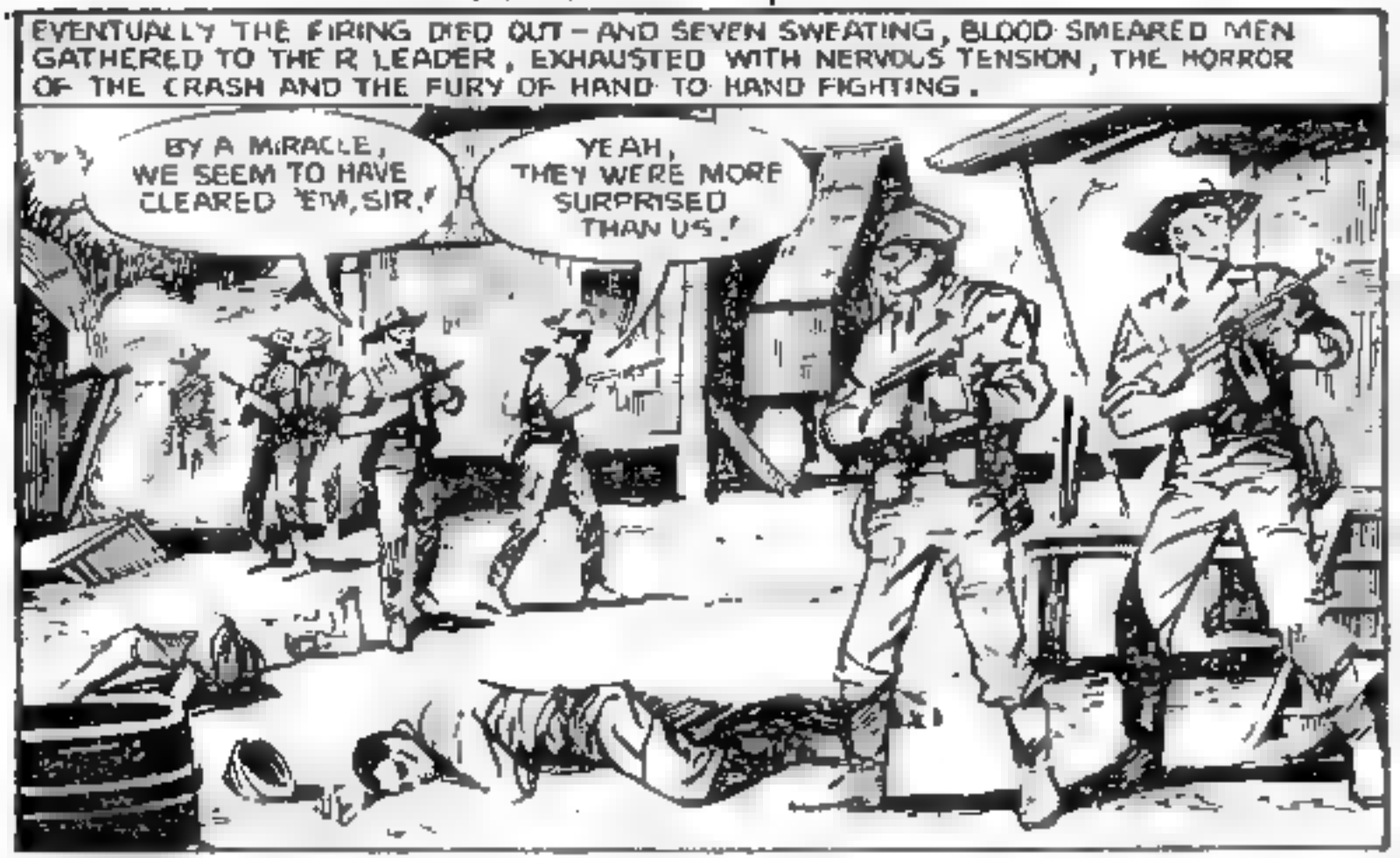
THE GLIDER JARRED HEAVILY ON THE GROUND, BOUNCED TWICE AND SLEWED TO A SHATTERING NOSE DOWN HALT - A JAGGED TREE STUMP CAUGHT MAJOR BRODIE AND THE MAN BEHIND HIM, KILLING THEM BOTH OUTRIGHT.
AAAGH!


FOR A MOMENT THERE WAS NO MOVEMENT FROM INSIDE THE SMASHED-UP GLIDER . . . THEN BRUISED, DAZED FIGURES BEGAN TO STAGGER OUT JASON MACGORE IN IN THEIR LEAD.
AT THE SWINE! KILL THEM!
AAAGH!

JASON MACGORE, THE MAN OF ACTION, HAD RECOVERED HIMSELF. SWINGING A GREAT SAMURAI SWORD WHICH HE HAD WRENCHED FROM HIS FIRST VICTIM, HE CHARGED INTO THE ENEMY LIKE A DEMENTED SAMSON AMONG THE PHILISTINES.

"LUCKY" SKINNER HAD TURNED BACK TO SNATCH A HANDFUL OF GRENADES FROM THE GLIDER — AND WAS TOSSING THEM INTO THE NEARBY HUTS . . .

WHILE TOUGH, WIRY SERGEANT BILL BADDOCK WAS EVERYWHERE — PUMPING HIS RATTLING TOMMY GUN AT THE JAPANESE.


EVENTUALLY THE FIRING DIED OUT – AND SEVEN SWEATING, BLOOD SMEARED MEN GATHERED TO THEIR LEADER, EXHAUSTED WITH NERVOUS TENSION, THE HORROR OF THE CRASH AND THE FURY OF HAND TO HAND FIGHTING.
BY A MIRACLE, WE SEEM TO HAVE CLEARED 'EM, SIR!
YEAH, THEY WERE MORE SURPRISED THAN US!

EVEN AS THE SOLDIER SPOKE, THERE CAME A SUDDEN BURST OF FIRE – AND HE FELL DEAD.
GET DOWN!
THAT HUT OVER THERE!

SKINNER, SHOOT ANY JAPS TRYING TO GET AWAY! BALOOCK AND THOMAS, WE'LL DEAL WITH THE HUT . . .

SO IT WAS THAT CORPORAL DAVID THOMAS FOUND HIMSELF LIVING HIS DREAM . . .
BOTH OF YOU, KEEP ME COVERED! I'LL CATCH THEM UNAWARES!
NO! NO! NO! IT CAN'T REALLY HAPPEN!

PARALYSED WITH TERROR, THOMAS WATCHED AS MACGORE CREPT UP TO THE HUT, KICKED OPEN THE DOOR — AND FIRED A WITHERING BURST INSIDE.
AND JUST AS IN THE NIGHTMARE, THE COLONEL THREW HIMSELF ASIDE TO THE GROUND.

FOR A MOMENT EVERYTHING WAS STILL AND THOMAS' FLESH CRINGED FOR HE KNEW WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT.

SURE ENOUGH, THE MUZZLE OF A JAPANESE MACHINE-GUN VERY SLOWLY PROTRUDED THROUGH THE WINDOW, POINTING STRAIGHT AT H.M...

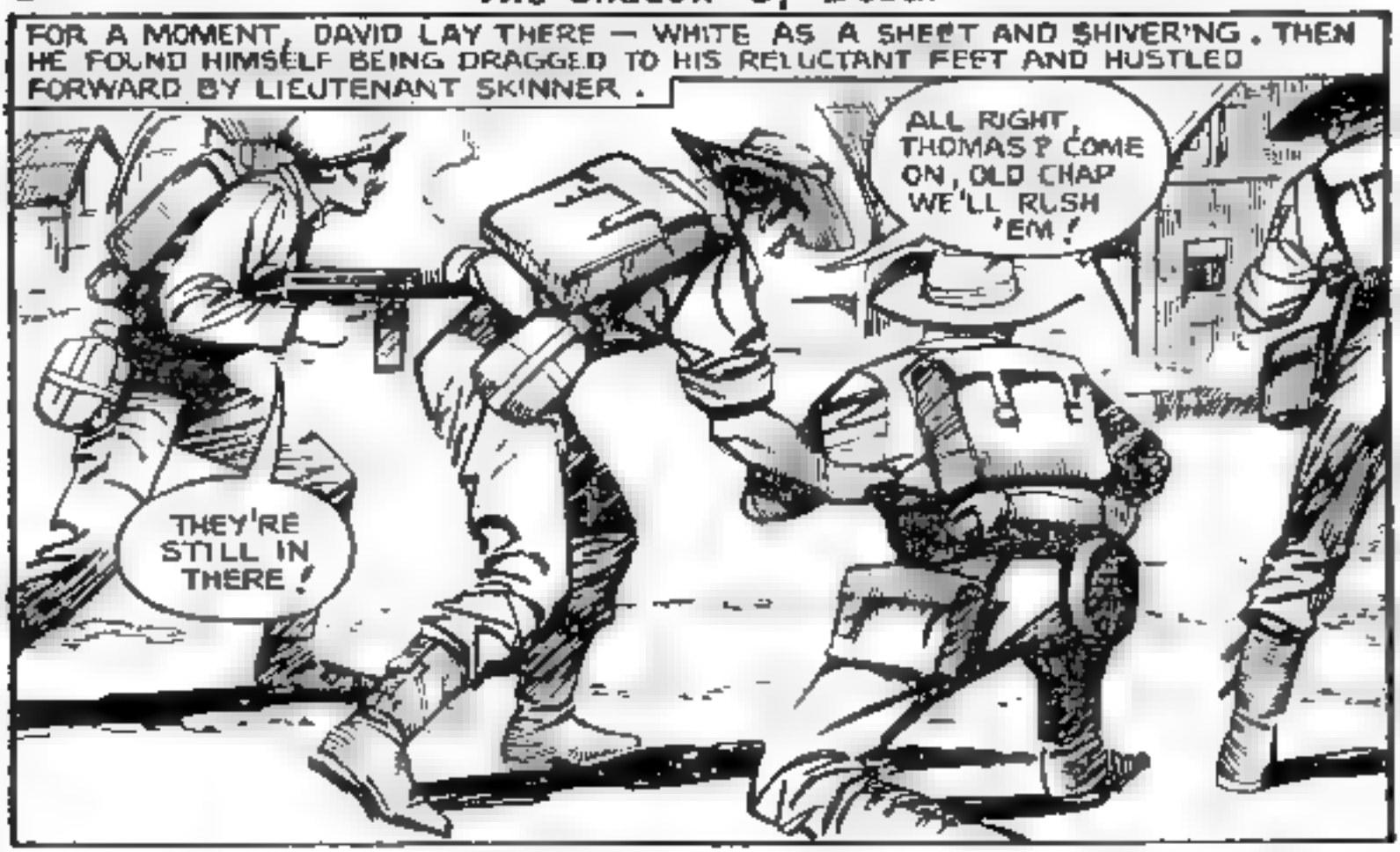
INSTINCT TOOK OVER — AND THOMAS FLUNG HIMSELF FLAT ON THE GROUND...

HE HEARD THE HYSTERICAL CHATTER OF THE GUN AND THE HISS OF THE BULLETS OVER HIS HEAD.

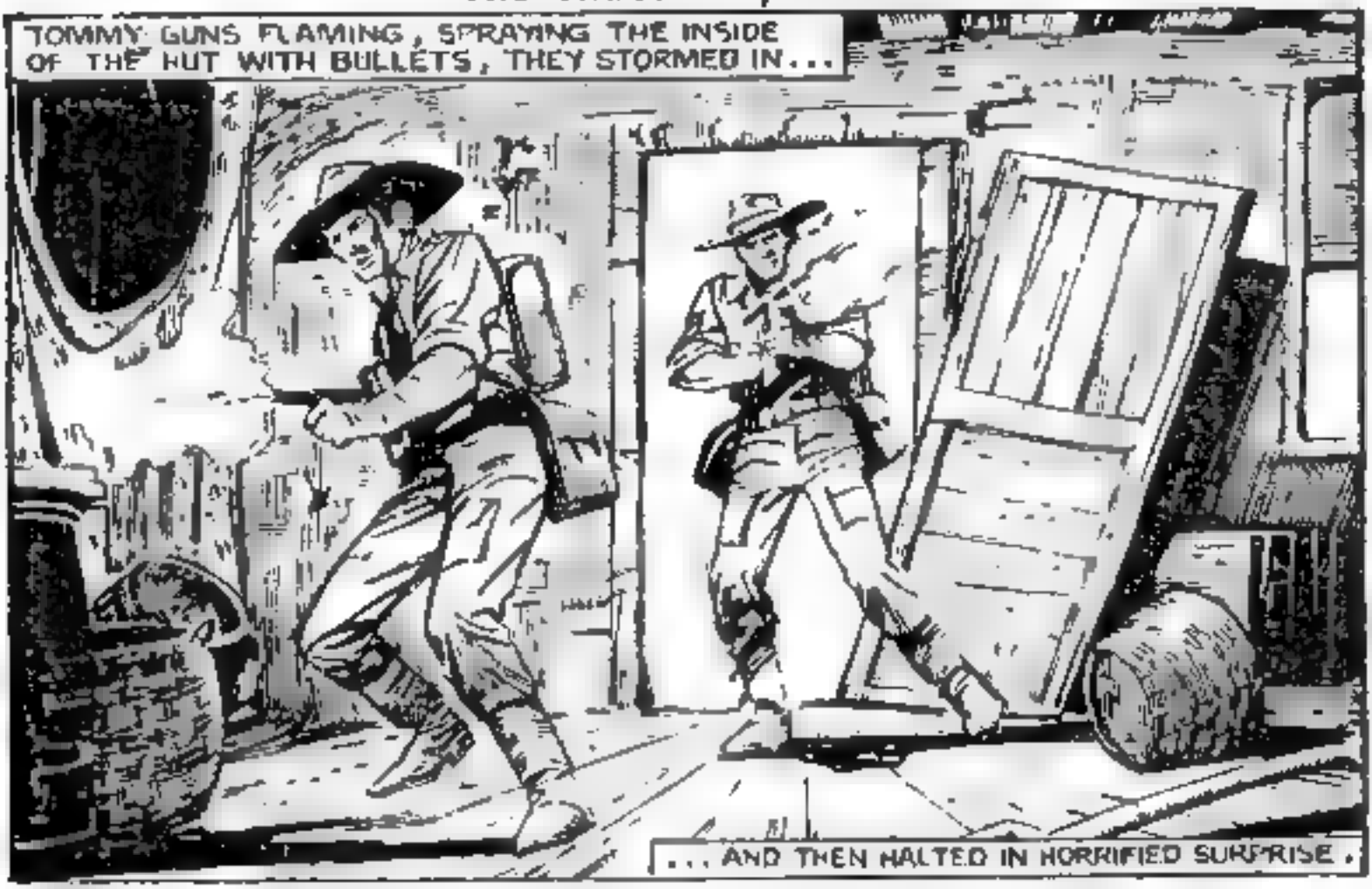
THERE WAS A GASPING, CHOKING SOUND... IT WAS THE MAN *BEHIND* DAVID THOMAS WHO WAS HIT...

TAKE THAT, YOU SWINE!

HE'S DONE FOR — HIT IN THE THROAT, POOR BLIGHTER!


FOR A MOMENT, DAVID LAY THERE — WHITE AS A SHEET AND SHIVERING. THEN HE FOUND HIMSELF BEING DRAGGED TO HIS RELUCTANT FEET AND HUSTLED FORWARD BY LIEUTENANT SKINNER.
ALL RIGHT, THOMAS? COME ON, OLD CHAP WE'LL RUSH 'EM!
THEY'RE STILL IN THERE!

SKINNER IN THE LEAD, THE TWO ENGINEERS DASHED TOWARDS THE HUT . . .
STRAIGHT THROUGH THE DOORWAY . . . AND DON'T STOP SHOOTING!


TOMMY GUNS FLAMING, SPRAYING THE INSIDE OF THE HUT WITH BULLETS, THEY STORMED IN...
... AND THEN HALTED IN HORRIFIED SURPRISE.

THE HUT WAS COMPLETELY EMPTY SAVE FOR A NUMBER OF LARGE OVENS AND SOME COOKING UTENSILS. THERE WAS NO OTHER EXIT...
MY STARS! LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!
GREAT SCOTT! WHAT'RE WE FIGHTING ON THIS TRIP- GHOSTS!

TOGETHER THEY DASHED OUT OF THAT INCREDIBLE HUT AND EVEN AS THEY RAN, THE VIOLENT CLATTER OF MACHINE-GUN FIRE STARTED BEHIND THEM AGAIN.

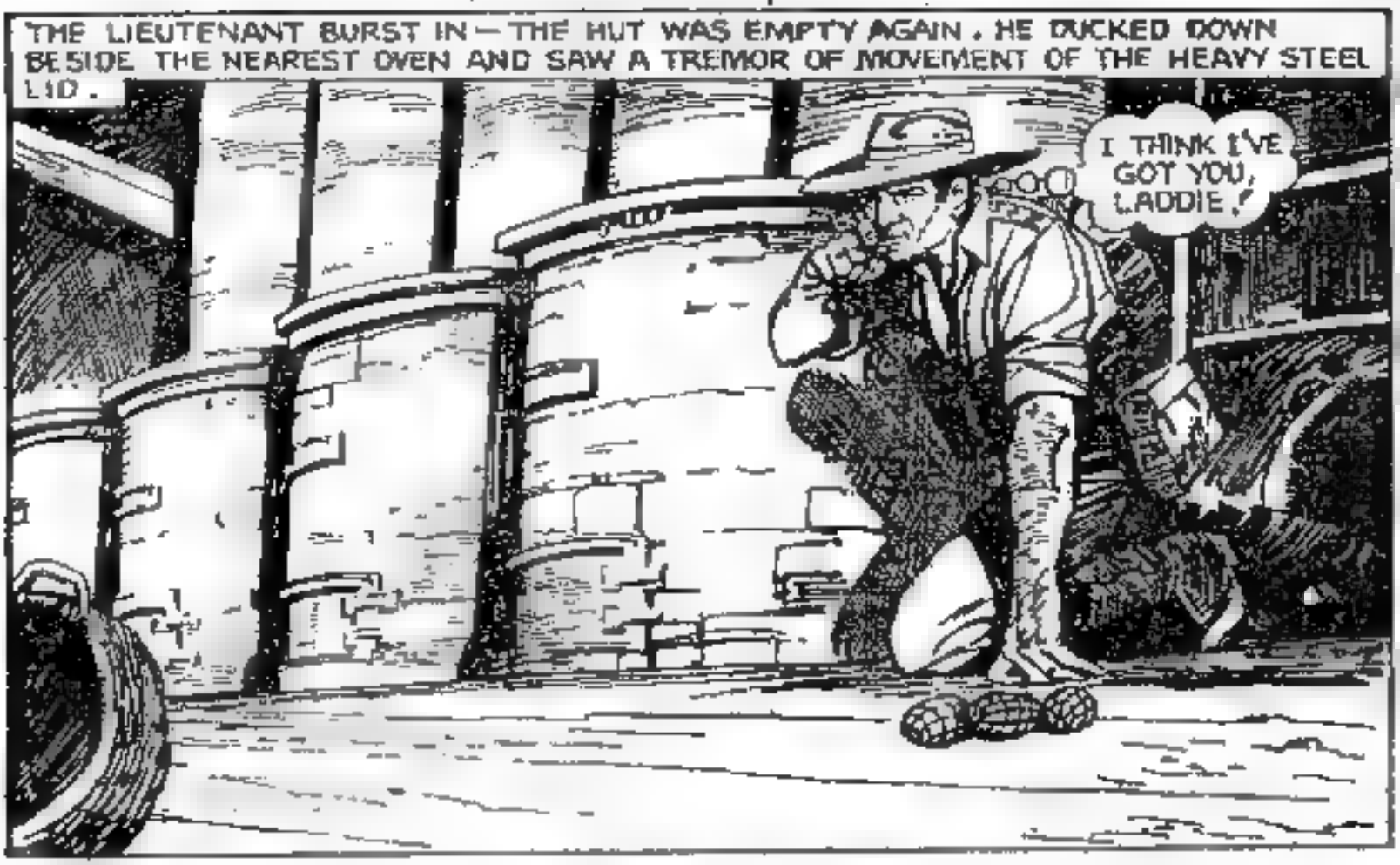
THERE THEY ARE – AT THE WINDOW AGAIN!

BUT LIEUTENANT SKINNER WAS NOT THE MAN TO ACCEPT THE INEXPLICABLE FOR LONG . . .

HERE, BRIGGS – LET ME HAVE YOUR GRENADES! I THINK I KNOW WHERE THE SNIPERS ARE! GIVE ME ALL THE COVERING FIRE YOU CAN . . .

THE BRAVE SKINNER WAS NEVER LUCKIER THAN WHEN HE RAN BACK TOWARDS THE HUT THROUGH A VERITABLE HAIL OF BULLETS . . .

JUST AS HE GOT THERE, THE FIRING STOPPED – AND THE MUZZLES DISAPPEARED.


THE LIEUTENANT BURST IN — THE HUT WAS EMPTY AGAIN. HE DUCKED DOWN BESIDE THE NEAREST OVEN AND SAW A TREMOR OF MOVEMENT OF THE HEAVY STEEL LID.
I THINK I'VE GOT YOU, LADDIE!

THE GRENADES HAD FOUR SECOND FUSES . . . SKINNER PULLED THE PIN, AND COUNTED THREE BEFORE HE GRABBED THE LID . . .
. . . FOUR!
AAAAAAA . . !
. . . AND SLAMMED IT DOWN AGAIN ON THE EXPLOSION.

WHEN ALL WAS QUIET AGAIN, THE OTHERS CAME INTO THE HUT.
WELL DONE, MISTER SKINNER, S.R.!
THE CUNNING DEVILS!

COLONEL JASON MACGORE TURNED TO THE OTHERS . . .
ONLY FIVE OF US LEFT! WHATEVER'S HAPPENED TO THE OTHER PARTY, WE MUST STILL ENDEAVOUR TO REACH THE BRIDGE. SERGEANT, COLLECT ALL THE STORES WE CAN CARRY FROM THE GLIDER.
YESSIR!

A HAIL FROM OUTSIDE BROUGHT THEM HURRYING FROM THE HUT OF DEATH.
OVER 'ERE, SIR! ONE OF THE LOCALS!
IS HE ALIVE, BRIGGS? PERHAPS HE CAN GIVE US SOME INFORMATION.

Chapter 3. The Blind Man

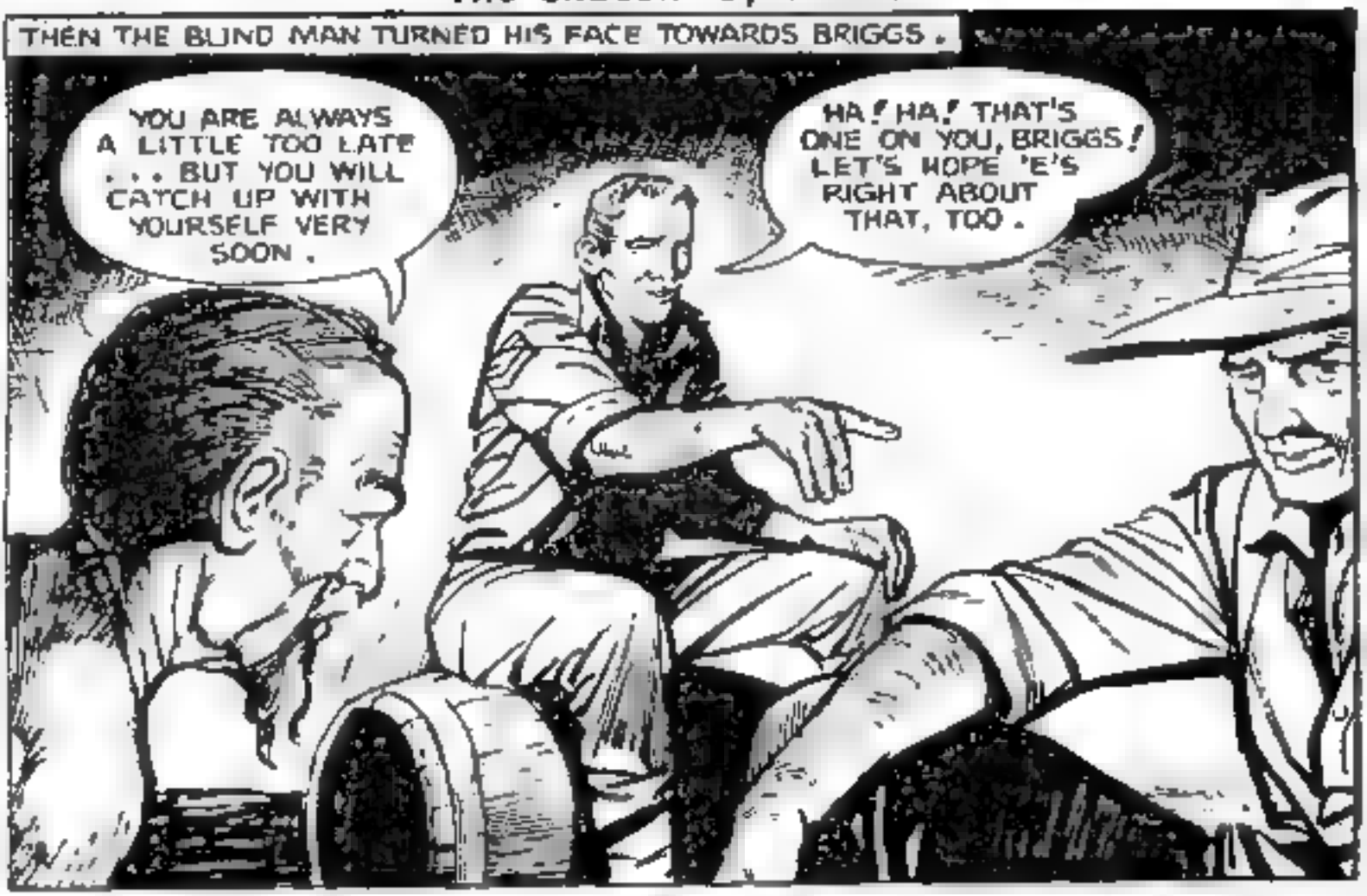
THE FOUR MEN JOINED BRIGGS BESIDE THE EMACIATED BODY OF AN OLD BURMAN. THE NATIVE'S EYES WERE LIFELESS AND STARING . . . BUT THEN HIS LIPS MOVED.

SKINNER STARTED IN SURPRISE . . .
WHAT'S THAT? HOW DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THEM?
NO TIME FOR THAT, SKINNER! LET'S GET THOSE STORES OUT OF THE GLIDER.

SOON THE DEMOLITION EQUIPMENT HAD BEEN SALVAGED FROM THE WRECKED GLIDER.
. . . GELIGNITE, EXPLODER, FUSES — EVERYTHING, SIR!
GOOD! NOW, WE'LL BREW UP BEFORE WE SET OFF! YOU CAN GIVE THE OLD MAN SOME FOOD.

The Shadow Of Death

THEY WERE ALL THUNDERSTRUCK! WHAT DID THIS MAN KNOW OF SERGEANT BALDOCK – OR OF LONDON?
GREAT SCOT!
I BELIEVE YOU DO 'AVE SECOND SIGHT, YOU OLD SO AND SO! WELL, IT MEANS I GET BACK TO BLIGHTY IF YOU'RE RIGHT... AND, BY JINGO, NOTHING'S GOING TO STOP ME THIS TIME!
AND, YOU'LL THINK IT'S OVER MY DEAD BODY!
STONE THE CROWS SARGE – HE'S GOT YER FAVOURITE PHRASE TO A TEE!
EVEN BALDOCK HAD TO SMILE... BUT THE OLD MAN'S FACE REMAINED IMPASSIVE.


THEN THE BLIND MAN TURNED HIS FACE TOWARDS BRIGGS.
YOU ARE ALWAYS A LITTLE TOO LATE . . . BUT YOU WILL CATCH UP WITH YOURSELF VERY SOON.
HA! HA! THAT'S ONE ON YOU, BRIGGS! LET'S HOPE 'E'S RIGHT ABOUT THAT, TOO.

SUDDENLY SKINNER SPOKE UP. . .
NOW, WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF *ME*? I'M NEVER AFRAID OF THE *TRUTH*.
I KNOW YOU WELL, BRAVE MAN OF ACTION . . . YOU ARE SURELY *A MAN WITH NINE LIVES!*
LUMME, SIR! 'E'S GOT *YOU* TAPED AS WELL . . . YOU'RE THE LUCKIEST MAN I EVER KNEW.

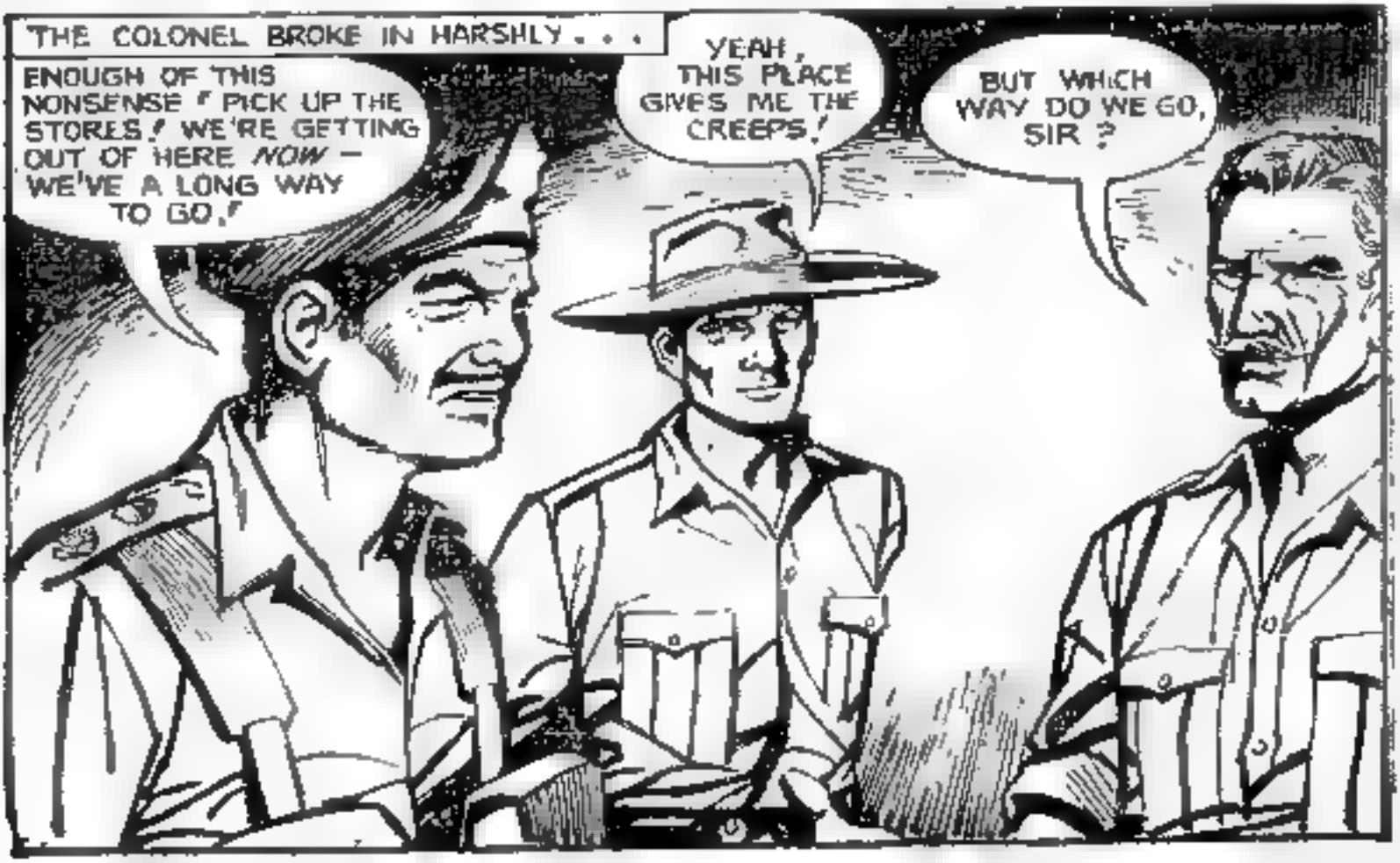
THE OLD MAN SLOWLY SHIFTED HIS BLIND GAZE TO DAVID THOMAS AND SPOKE GENTLY TO HIM.
YOU WHO DO NOT ASK . . . YOU ARE DIFFERENT. I TELL YOU THAT YOU WILL COUNT TEN, BEFORE YOU OFFER UP YOUR LIFE!
A MOMENTARY CHILL WENT THROUGH THOMAS AGAIN FOR THE WORDS SEEMED TO CONFIRM HIS OWN GROWING KNOWLEDGE THAT HIS NUMBER WAS COMING UP. . .

YOU ALREADY HAVE VISIONS OF FEAR. BUT YOU, TOO, HAVE COURAGE— OF A DIFFERENT KIND. NOT UNTIL THE WORLD ROARS ABOUT YOU, WILL YOU SEE CLEARLY THE WHISPER OF TRUTH.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND A WORD - BUT I SUPPOSE IT MEANS SOMETHING.

SUDDENLY, THEY BECAME AWARE OF COLONEL MACGORE'S GLOWERING FIGURE STANDING BEHIND THE OLD MAN . . .
WELL, BLIND MAN! EVIDENTLY YOU HAVE BEEN TELLING THE OTHERS THEIR FUTURE . . . VERY WELL, TELL ME!

FOR SEVERAL SECONDS, THERE WAS SILENCE. THEN THE OLD MAN SLOWLY TURNED HIS HEAD.
I HAVE NO NEED TO TELL ONE WHO KNOWS ALREADY!

MACGORE TURNED AWAY, CLENCHING HIS TEETH.
YOU KNOW SOMETHING NOW OF YOUR DESTINIES . . . YET THERE WILL BE SUFFERING FOR THE KNOWLEDGE. I SEE AMONG YOU BOTH THE LIVING AND THE DEAD FOR ONLY TWO WILL WALK AWAY AT THE END.


THE COLONEL BROKE IN HARSHLY . . .
ENOUGH OF THIS NONSENSE! PICK UP THE STORES! WE'RE GETTING OUT OF HERE *NOW* — WE'VE A LONG WAY TO GO!
YEAH, THIS PLACE GIVES ME THE CREEPS!
BUT WHICH WAY DO WE GO, SIR?

TAKE THAT PATH, BEYOND THE HUT WITH THE OVENS . . . THAT IS WHERE YOUR ORDEAL LIES — OVER THE HILL.
WE WILL GO THE WAY HE SAYS!

BUT WE'RE SOLDIERS, SIR! WITH MAPS AND COMPASSES! WE CAN'T RELY ON THE WORD OF AN OLD BLIND MAN — HE MIGHT BE A SPY!
THAT'S ENOUGH, SERGEANT. GET THE MEN ON THE MOVE!

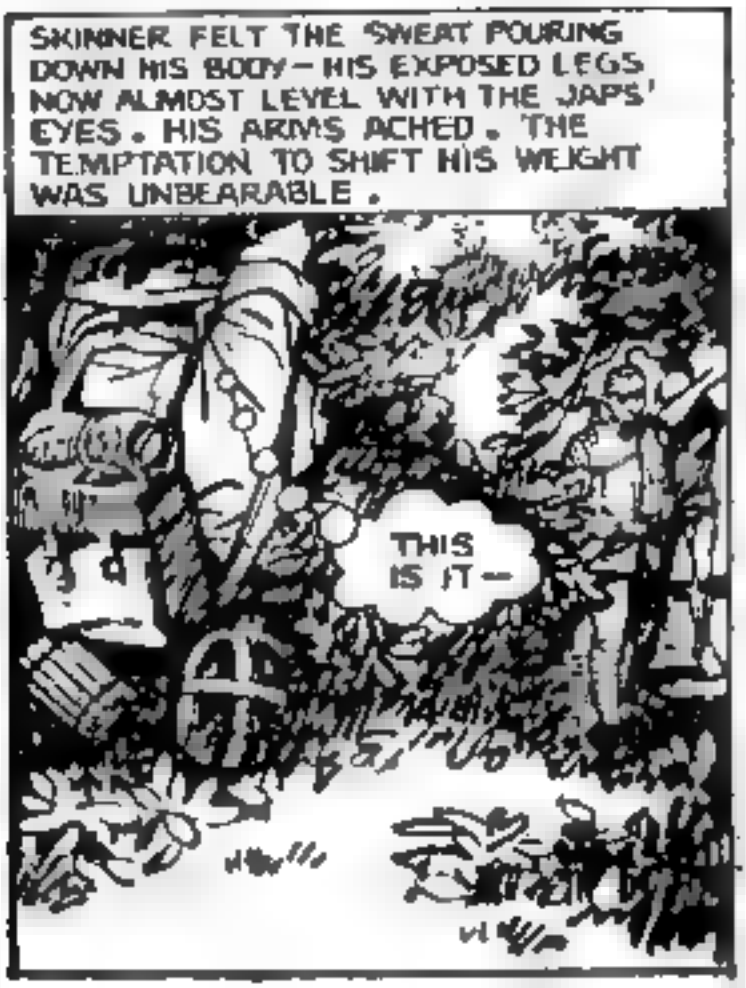
THEY SET OFF, FOLLOWING THE TRACK THE NATIVE HAD INDICATED. COLONEL JASON MACGORE LED THEM WITHOUT A WORD, NOT HESITATING TO CHECK HIS WAY AT ALL. SOON IT WAS DAYLIGHT . . .
LUMME! ONLY TWO OF US TO SURVIVE . . . WHICH TWO?
WHY THE HECK THE COLONEL TAKES THE OLD MAN'S WORD WITHOUT QUESTION, I DON'T KNOW . . . IT'S FLIPPIN' DANGEROUS!

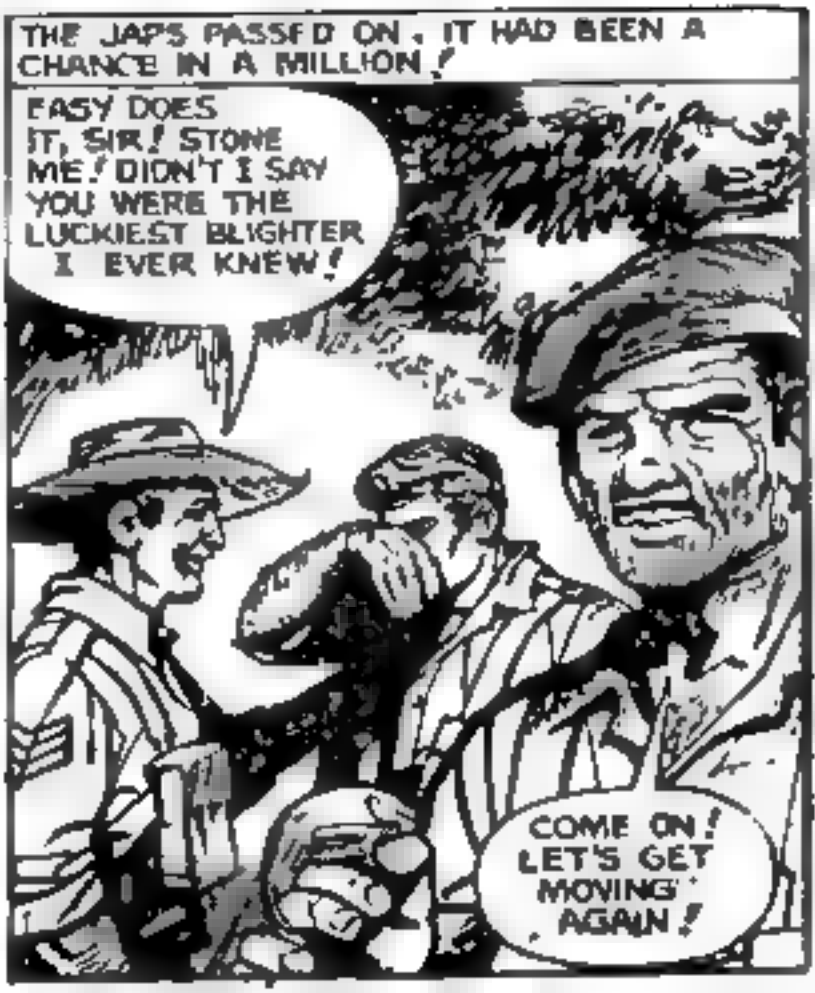
SUDDENLY MACGORE HALTED. TO THEIR STRAINING EARS CAME THE TREAD OF FEET, AND THE JANGLE OF EQUIPMENT . . .
SOMEONE COMING UP BEHIND, SIR! JAPS! GET INTO COVER QUICK!
I KNEW IT! THE OLD DEVIL'S SPLIT ON US!

THEY THREW THEMSELVES INTO THE UNDERGROWTH IN VARIOUS DIRECTIONS AND "LUCKY" SKINNER LEAPED UPWARDS TO THE COVER OF THE TREES ABOVE . . . THERE WERE FURIOUS WHISPERS .
CURSE IT! IT'S THICKER THAN I EXPECTED! I'LL HAVE TO COME DOWN AGAIN!
FOR HEAVENS' SAKE, STAY WHERE YOU ARE, SKINNER! THEY'RE JUST COMING!

A PARTY OF JAPANESE, LEADING A MULE, APPEARED FROM THE JUNGLE. THERE WAS A NATIVE WITH THEM . . .
MY LEGS MUST BE IN FULL VIEW! WE'RE DONE FOR!
TOO MANY OF THEM! WE *MUSTN'T* BE SEEN!

The Shadow Of Death





ALMOST BEFORE THEY REALISED IT, THEY HAD BROKEN THROUGH TO THE RIVER. JASON MACGORE LOOKED ABOUT HIM AT THE LANDMARKS, RECOGNITION IN HIS EYES.
IT'S STRANGE — BUT I BELIEVE THIS IS OUR ORIGINAL LANDING POINT.
LOOK, SIR! ISN'T THAT THE TAIL OF A GLIDER?

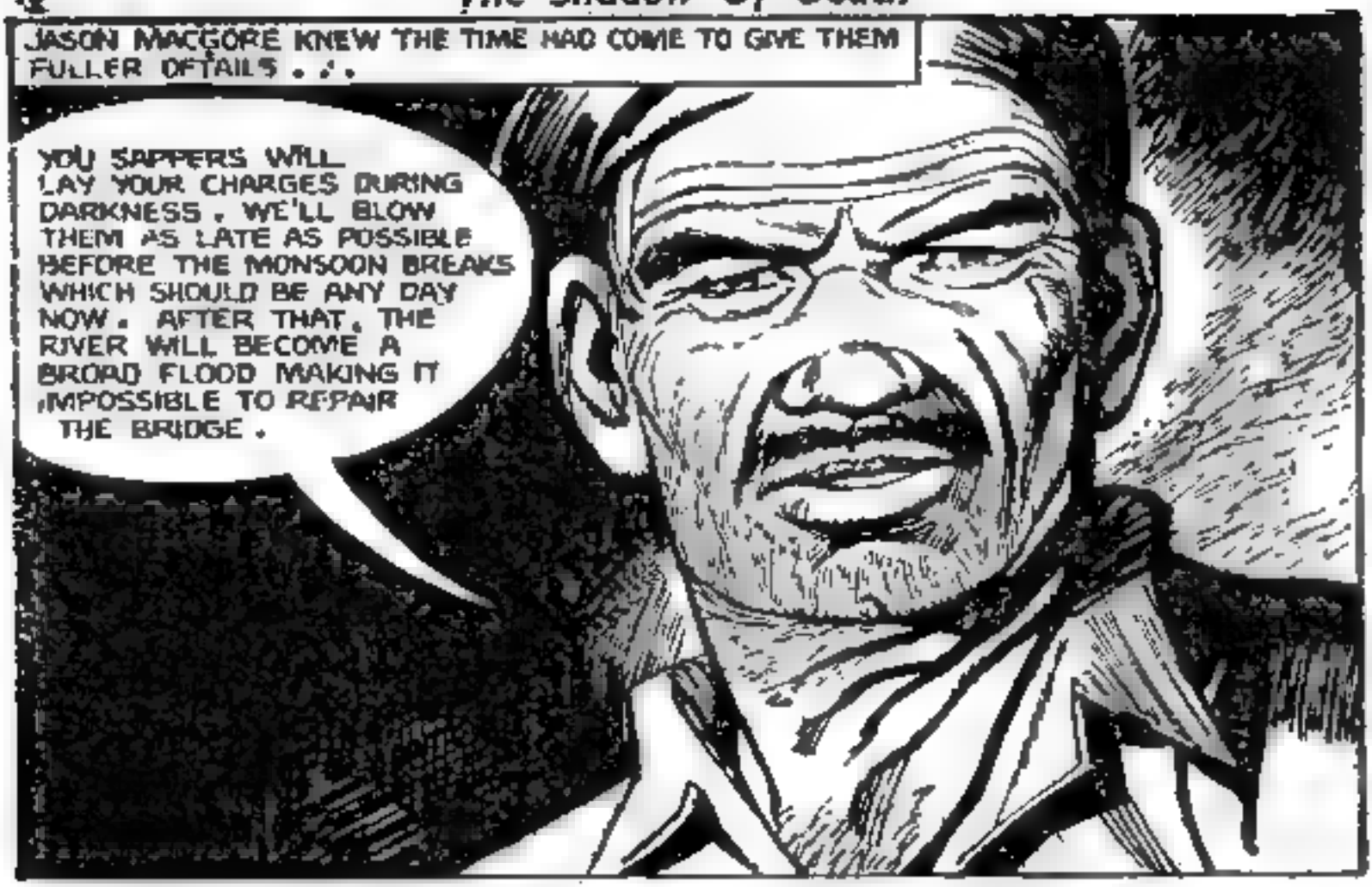
THEY WERE LOOKING ACROSS A BROAD MUD BANK TOWARDS THE SLUGGISH WATERS OF THE RIVER WHICH FLOWED IN A DISTANT CHANNEL.
YES, IT'S A WACO. POOR BLIGHTERS! MUST HAVE MISSED THE MUD-BANK IN THE DARK. SO THE OLD MAN WAS RIGHT, CONFOUND HIM!
YOU OTHERS STAY HERE - WHILE I MAKE QUITE SURE NO ONE HAS SURVIVED

SO COLONEL JASON MACGORE LED FOUR MEN INSTEAD OF TWENTY FOUR TO THE BRIDGE ACROSS THE CHIKNIK RIVER WHICH HAD ONCE CARRIED AN OLD RAILWAY, AND WAS NOW ON ONE OF THE MAIN JAPANESE SUPPLY ROUTES.

IT WAS CLOSE TO NIGHTFALL WHEN THEY REACHED A POINT TWO HUNDRED YARDS FROM THEIR OBJECTIVE.
THERE IT IS... AND NO GUARDS! WE'RE IN LUCK
HERE'S A GOOD SITE FOR THE EXPLODER! WE'LL DIG IN!

IN A MOMENT, THEY WERE LAYING OUT STORES UNDER COVER.
I'LL RECCE THE SIZE OF THE BRIDGE FROM HERE! HOPE WE'VE GOT ENOUGH GEL GNITE.
SHOULD BE PLENTY, SIR — FOR ONE CLEAN CUT!
GET EVERYTHING READY WHILE IT'S LIGHT. THEN I'LL TALK TO YOU.

The Shadow Of Death



LAMBETH BRIDGE!
YES – I NAMED IT AFTER YOU, BALDOCK. THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE LUCKY.

BEFORE THE HORRIFIED SERGEANT BALDOCK COULD SAY ANYTHING FURTHER – LIEUTENANT SKINNER BROKE IN URGENTLY...
EXCUSE ME, SIR – BUT THERE'S A BODY LYING ON THE BRIDGE... A NATIVE OF SOME SORT. I KNOW THIS SOUNDS SILLY – BUT IT LOOKS LIKE THAT BLIND CHAP WE SPOKE TO IN THE VILLAGE!
NO! NO! HE TOLD ME! "YOU'LL LIVE TO CROSS LAMBETH BRIDGE BUT OVER MY DEAD BODY!"

Chapter 4. The Bridge

THE SOLDIERS HESITATED NERVOUSLY AT THE APPROACHES TO THE BRIDGE — AND THEN LIEUTENANT SKINNER SHRUGGED AND STROOF FORWARD.

A QUICK EXAMINATION SHOWED THAT IT WAS THE BLIND OLD MAN — AND HE WAS DEAD, PRESUMABLY SHOT BY THE JAPS. AS THEY MOVED HIM OFF THE ROAD, A LOW RUMBLING SOUND ECHOED THROUGH THE HILLS.

THEY SCURRIED INTO HIDING AGAIN AS A SMALL PARTY OF JAPS CLATTERED ON TO THE BRIDGE.

PERHAPS THEY'VE COME BACK FOR HIM! LOOK! THEY RE POSTING A SENTRY!

REMEMBER WHAT 'E SAID - OVER 'IS DEAD BODY! WE'VE GONE AND MEDDLED IN 'IS MAGIC!

KEEP YOUR VOICES DOWN AND LISTEN! WHEN IT'S DARK, I KILL THE SENTRY MYSELF, AND KEEP GUARD THIS END! YOU SAPPERS! YOU'VE GOT TILL THE SENTRIES CHANGE AGAIN TO FIX YOUR CHARGES AND LAY OUT YOUR WIRE!

IN THE DARKNESS BEFORE THE MOON ROSE, MACGORE CREPT UP BEHIND THE JAPANESE SENTRY . . .

UGH!

AYR THE ONLY TWO SURVIVING MEMBERS OF THE INFANTRY ON SILENT GUARD, ONE AT EACH END OF THE BRIDGE - THE TRIPLE SAPPERS SET TO WORK AT THE CENTRE OF THE SPAN . . .
HAVE YOU GOT YOUR'S FIXED BRIGGS? GOOD! . . . AND THOMAS?
ALL SET, SIR! . . . I'VE GOT THE PRIMERS IN MY POCKET - AND YOU'VE GOT THE DETONATORS!

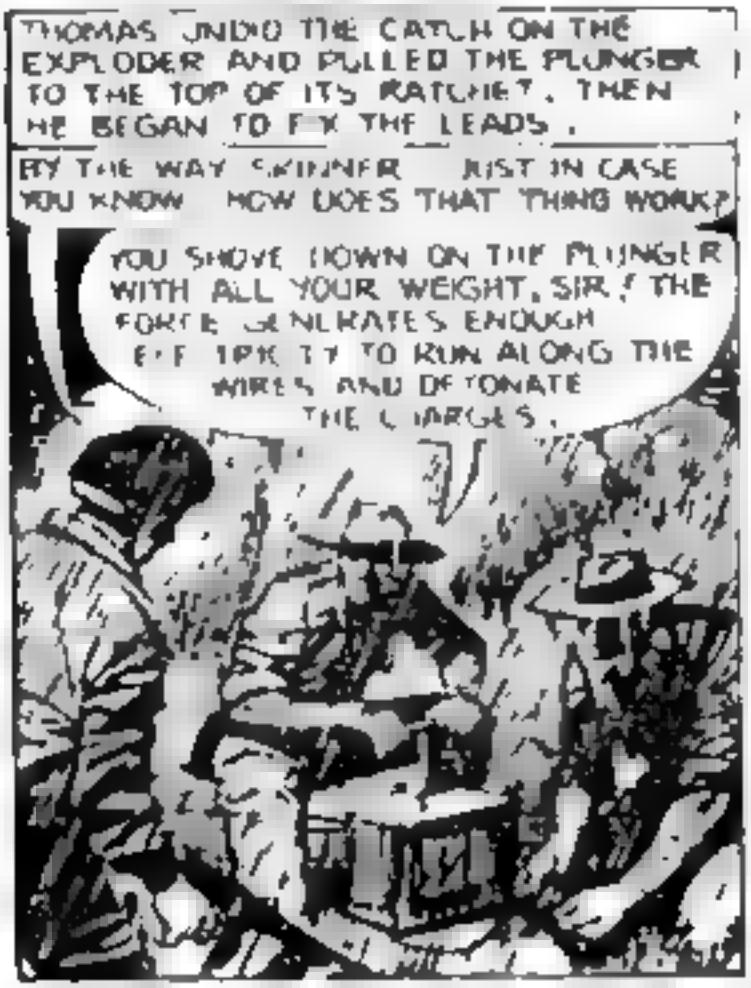
SUDDENLY THERE WAS A VIVID FLASH OF LIGHTNING . . . FOR A MOMENT EVERYTHING WAS ILLUMINATED AS LIGHT AS DAY THEY FROZE IN THEIR POSITIONS .
KEEP STILL!
THOUGHT I FELT RAIN THEN . . . IS IT THE MONSOON?

DARKNESS AGAIN, SEEMINGLY MORE INTENSE THAN EVER, THEN THE REVERBERATING THUNDER . . .
YES B' HARRY, IT IS RAINING! QUICKLY NOW, WE WIPE UP! BRIGGS, KEEP A LOOK-OUT!
I-I DON'T LIKE THIS - EVERYTHING'S SO PERISHIN' SPOOKY!

BRIGGS, STAY HERE AND SEE THAT NOTHING COMES UNDONE. . . THE CORPORAL AND I WILL PAY OUT THE WIRE.
DON'T LEAVE ME ALONE, SIR - NOT OUT 'ERE!
YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT, BRIGGSY — BACK IN FIVE MINUTES!

SOMETHING MADE SKINNER LOOK ROUND . . .
JUST A MOMENT! DON'T LEAVE THINGS LYING AROUND, CHAPS — IT MIGHT WARN THE JAPS THAT SOMETHING'S UP!
NO, YOU 'URRY AND GET BACK, SIR! I'LL DO IT! IT'LL GIVE ME SOMETHINK TO DO WHILE I'M WAITIN'.

THE RAIN WAS LASHING DOWN NOW. IT HAD TAKEN TWO HECTIC HOURS TO LAY THE DETONATORS BUT ALL THEY HAD LEFT TO DO WAS TO CONNECT UP THE EXPLODER.
IT'S ALL CLEAR ALONG HERE!
WE'RE NEARLY SET UP SIR! JUST GOING BACK TO BRIGGS FOR A FINAL CHECK
GOOD MAN! EASIER THAN I HAD EXPECTED!


THOMAS UNDID THE CATCH ON THE EXPLODER AND PULLED THE PLUNGER TO THE TOP OF ITS RATCHET. THEN HE BEGAN TO FIX THE LEADS.
BY THE WAY SKINNER JUST IN CASE YOU KNOW HOW DOES THAT THING WORK?
YOU SHOVE DOWN ON THE PLUNGER WITH ALL YOUR WEIGHT, SIR! THE FORCE GENERATES ENOUGH ELECTRICITY TO RUN ALONG THE WIRES AND DETONATE THE CHARGES.

WILL THE RAIN SPOIL THE CHARGES?
GOOD GRIEF, NO, SIR! HELPS IF ANYTHING WELL, WE'LL BE BACK WITH BRIGGS AND BALDOCK IN A MINUTE, SIR!

SERGEANT BALCOCK SAW THE TWO COME BACK OVER THE BRIDGE. THEN TO HIS HORROR THERE WAS A JAGGED FORK OF LIGHTNING, BRIGHTER THAN ANYTHING BEFORE.

IT'S AS CLEAR AS DAYLIGHT! IF ANY JAPS SEE THEM...

IT IN THAT SAME FLASH SCINNER AND THOMAS SAW BRIGGS UP AGAINST THE GIRDERS — HIS EYES WIDE WITH TERROR. THERE WAS SOMETHING ROUND HIS NECK...

A AGH! MY DREAM...

HECK, WHAT IS IT — A ROPE?

NO BY HEAVENS! IT'S A SNAKE! DON'T MOVE, BRIGGS!

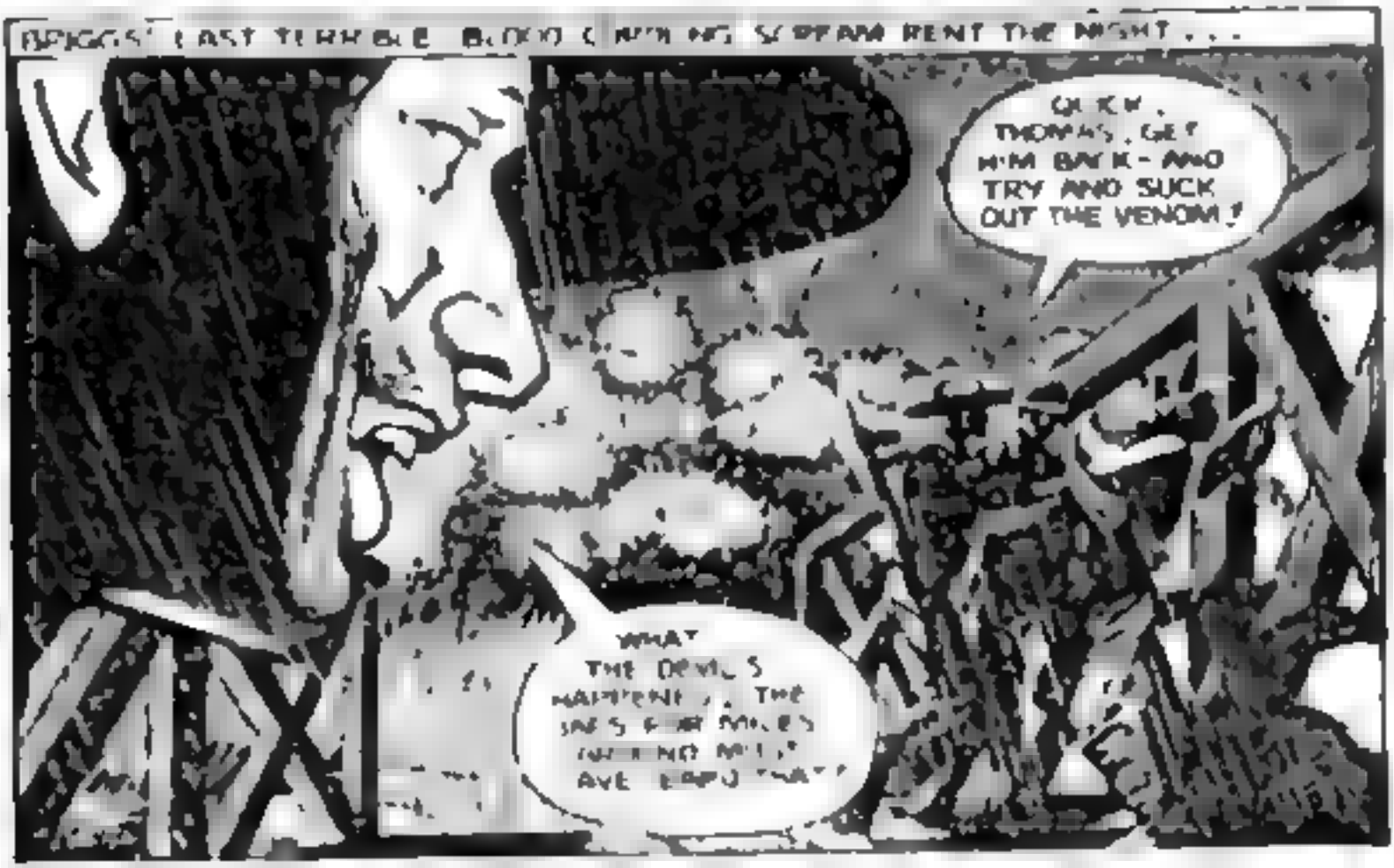
IT WAS THEN THAT BRIGGS AT LAST REMEMBERED THE END OF HIS NIGHTMARE . . .

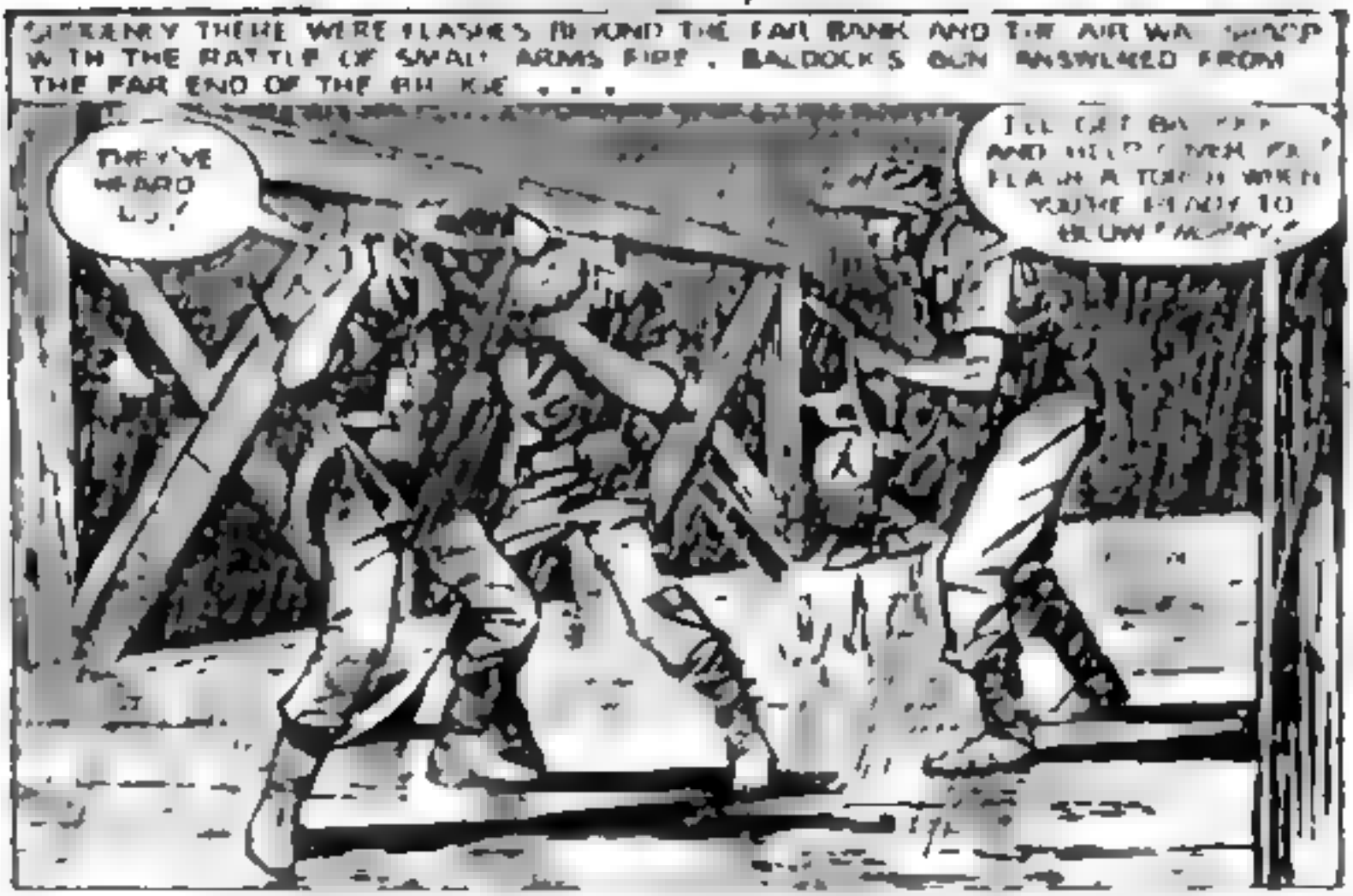
THE ROPE IT TURNED INTO – INTO A – A SNAKE – AND IT . . . AMIGA!

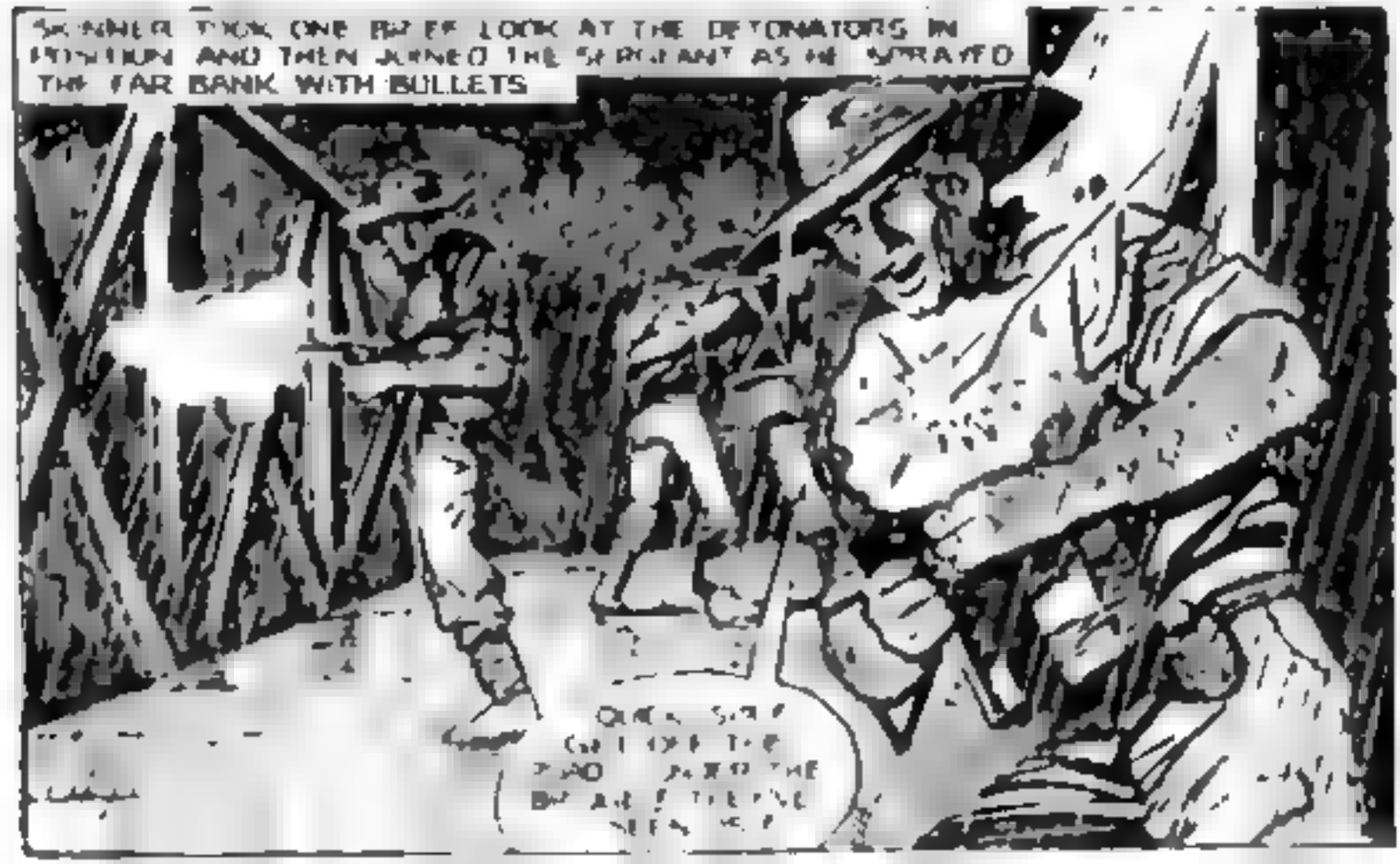
BRIGGS' LAST TERRIBLE BLOOD CURDLING SCREAM RENT THE NIGHT . . .

QUICK, THOMAS, GET HIM BACK – AND TRY AND SUCK OUT THE VENOM!

WHAT THE DEVIL'S HAPPENED, THE JAPS FOR MILES GROUND MUST AVE EARD THAT!




SUDDENLY THERE WERE FLASHES BEYOND THE FAR BANK AND THE AIR WAS SWEPT WITH THE RATTLE OF SMALL ARMS FIRE . BALDOCK'S GUN ANSWERED FROM THE FAR END OF THE BRIDGE . . .
THEY'VE HEARD US!
I'LL GET BACK AND HELP COVER FOR FLASH A TORCH WHEN YOU'RE READY TO BLOW IT, MURPHY!


SKINNER TOOK ONE BRIEF LOOK AT THE DETONATORS IN POSITION AND THEN JUMPED THE SERGEANT AS HE SPRAYED THE FAR BANK WITH BULLETS
QUICK, SIR! GET OFF THE ROAD . . . INTO THE BUSHES! THEY'VE SEEN US!

EVEN AS THEY ROLLED FAR A JAPANESE GRENADE BURST ON THE
SKINNER HAD BEEN

A BURLY PANTING FIGURE . . .
MACGORE HERE! WHAT IN HECK'S THE MATTER?

LEAVE HIM, YOU FOOL! CAN'T YOU SEE HE'S DEAD! GET BACK TO THAT EXPLODER! THEY'LL BE ON US ANY MINUTE!
RIGHT HERE IT IS SIR!
I'LL FLASH IT THE OTHERS GET READY TO BLOW AS THEY RUN CLEAR. WHERE'S THAT CONFOUNDED TORCH?

DRENCHED TO THE SKIN, SKINNER AND BALDOCK COUNTED THE SECONDS...
I'LL KEEP AN EYE COCKED FOR THE SIGNAL ... WISH THEY'D DAMNED WELL HURRY!
IT'S VERY QUIET - IF YOU ASK ME, SIR, THE JAPS ARE GETTIN' READY TO RUSH US!
ANYWAY, WE'RE WIRED UP. NOTHING SHOULD STOP US BLOWING THE BRIDGE... BUT I'M AFRAID BRIGGS IS A GONNER.
THE OLD MAN SAID ONLY TWO WOULD GET AWAY! -- WELL, HE SAID I'D LIVE TO CROSS LAMBETH BRIDGE - AND IN A WAY I 'AVE - SO I GUESS I'LL BE JOINING BRIGGS. I'LL BE OVER MY DEAD BODY, ALL RIGHT!

LANDING — TACK
VILLAGE . .

RALDOCK FIRED A BURST AND THEN TOOK A QUICK LOOK OVER HIS SHOULDER.
THERE'S THE SIGNAL, SIR!
RIGHT! BACK ON TO THE BRIDGE AS YOU FIRE — THEN RUN LIKE HECK! TELL THE COLONEL TO BLOW THE CHARGES ... I'M STAYING TO KEEP THE BLIGHTERS AWAY FROM THEM!

FOR A FLEETING MOMENT THE TWO MEN LOOKED AT EACH OTHER.
BUT SIR ...!
I'VE GOT NINE LIVES — REMEMBER? GET MOVING, SERGEANT — THAT'S AN ORDER!

I'LL GET AWAY SOMEHOW! COME ON, YOU DEVILS! I'M TOLD I'VE GOT NINE LIVES — SO COME AND GET 'EM!
BUT— BUT HE'S STILL ON IT!

TORTURED BY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HE WAS EXECUTING HIS OWN WELL LIKED OFFICER, CORPORAL DAVID THOMAS DROVE HIS WHOLE WEIGHT DOWN ON THE PLUNGER . . .

THERE WAS A BLINDING FLASH AND A TREMENDOUS NOISE.

THEY LOOKED UP — *THE APEX WAS STILL INTACT.* LIGHTNING AND THUNDER HAD CAUSED THE FLASH AND THE NOISE.

GREAT HEAVENS! IT'S FAILED!

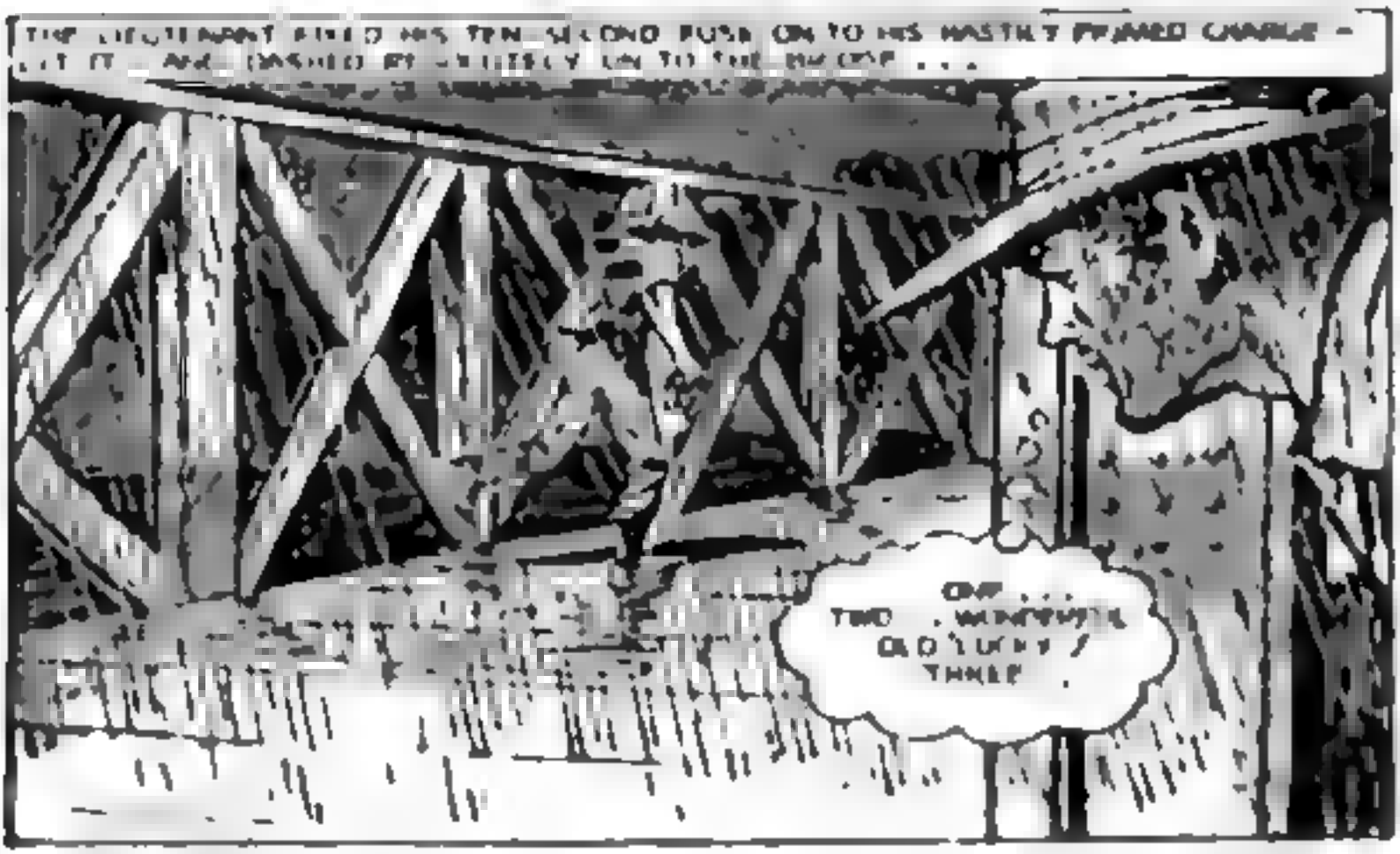
THEY WERE NOT TO KNOW THAT THE [illegible] IN THE CONVULSIONS OF HIS VIOLENT DEATH HAD TURN THE WIRE ABOUT.

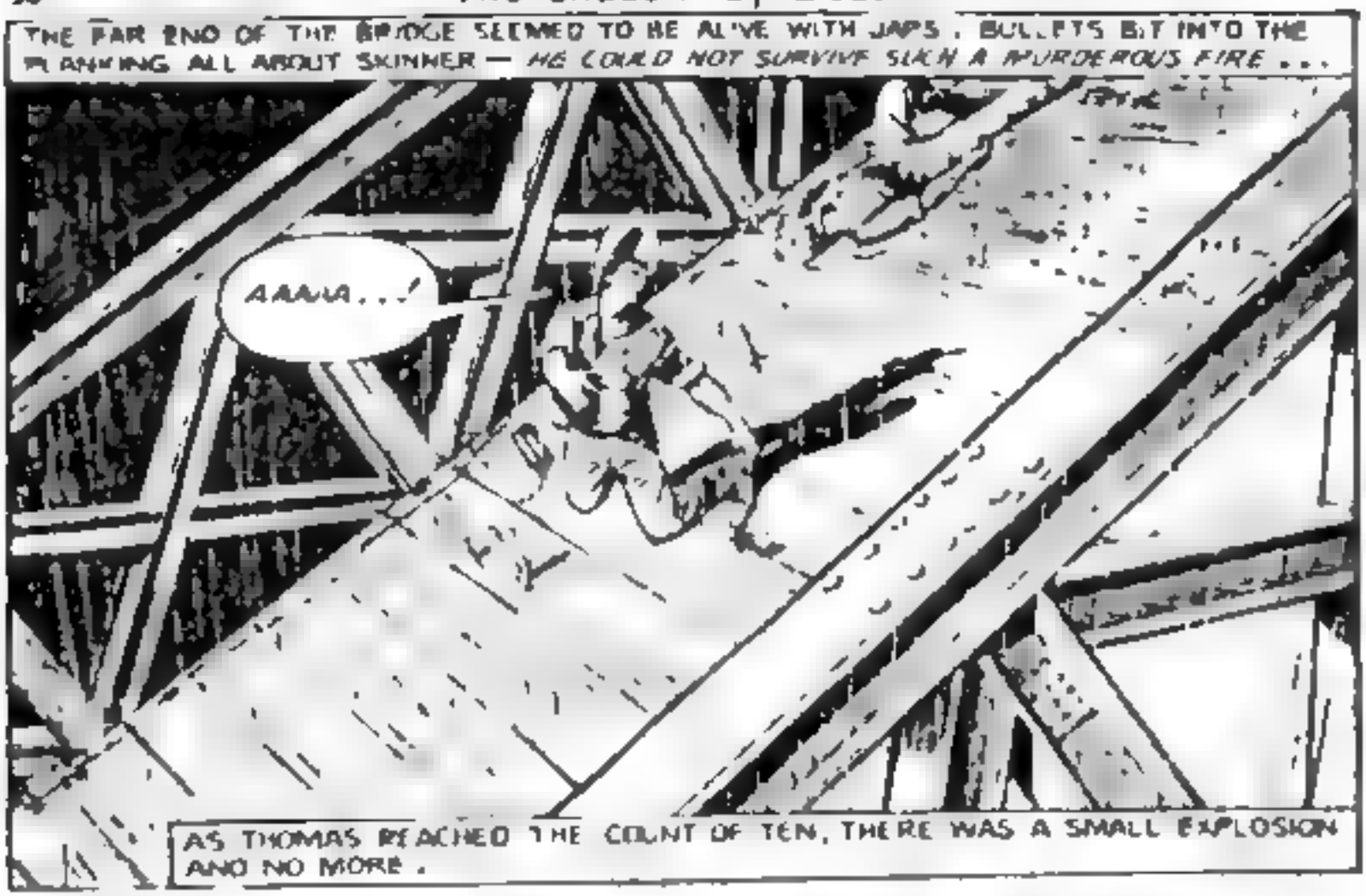
LIEUTENANT [illegible] MEANWHILE, HAD RALLIED ACROSS THE BRIDGE AFTER REPULSING THE PARTY OF JAPS ATTACKING HIM. TO HIS HORROR HE SAW HIS CORPORAL ON THE ROAD AHEAD OF HIM . . .

FOR PETE'S SAKE, DON'T WAIT FOR ME! THEY'RE COMING AGAIN! BLOW THE BRIDGE!

I'VE TRIED, SIR! THE CIRCUIT'S BROKEN!

SKINNER SUDDENLY KNEW HE HAD HAD HIS NINTH LIFE, WHEN THE EXPLODER FAILED. FROM THAT MOMENT, HE MUST CHOOSE HIS OWN DESTINY . . .
THEY'RE COMING IN FORCE THIS TIME . . . I CAN HEAR THE CLATTER OF TANK TRACKS!
QUICK THOMAS . . . I'VE GOT SOME SPARE GELIGNITE AND SOME TEN SECOND BURNING FUSES! YOU'VE GOT THE PRIMERS! I'LL TRY TO BLOW THE MAIN CHARGE YOU GET BACK!


THE LIEUTENANT FIXED HIS TEN-SECOND FUSE ON TO HIS HASTILY PRIMED CHARGE — LIT IT — AND DASHED RESOLUTELY ON TO THE BRIDGE . . .
ONE . . . TWO . . . WONDERFUL OLD LUCKY! THREE . . .


THE FAR END OF THE BRIDGE SEEMED TO BE ALIVE WITH JAPS. BULLETS BIT INTO THE PLANKING ALL ABOUT SKINNER — HE COULD NOT SURVIVE SUCH A MURDEROUS FIRE...
AAAAA...!
AS THOMAS REACHED THE COUNT OF TEN, THERE WAS A SMALL EXPLOSION AND NO MORE.

THOMAS AND THE SERGEANT STARED AT EACH OTHER, BLACK DESPAIR ON THEIR FACES, WHILE THE COLONEL MUTTERED WILDLY TO HIMSELF.
SKINNER'S LUCK'S OVER — AND HE DIED FOR NOTHING!
WE'RE DONE FOR — THE OLD MAN KNEW!
THEN THOMAS FELT IN HIS POCKETS. HE WAS DAZED AND SICK AND VERY MUCH AFRAID — BUT HE KNEW WHAT HE HAD TO DO.

THE CORPORAL HEARD A HOARSE WHISPER BESIDE HIM...
YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE A GO, TOO, BUT WELL, I'M COMIN' WITH YER LAD — FER WON'T BE ALONE.
IT WAS BALDOCK — THE TOUGH, KINDLY VETERAN, UNSHAKEABLE IN THE FACE OF CERTAIN DEATH.

THE BRIDGE WAS STREWN WITH THE BLOOD STAINED KHAKI BODIES OF DEAD JAPS. OTHERS WERE MOVING ON TO IT BESIDE TWO TANKS . .

BANZAAAH !

FORWARD YOU CURS !

AS SERGEANT BA[illegible] STRIVE TO HALT THE ENEMY ADVANCE, THOMAS STRUGGLED TO LIGHT THE [illegible] ON HIS REMAINING [illegible]

THE - THE MATCHES ARE WET - IT WON'T LIGHT !

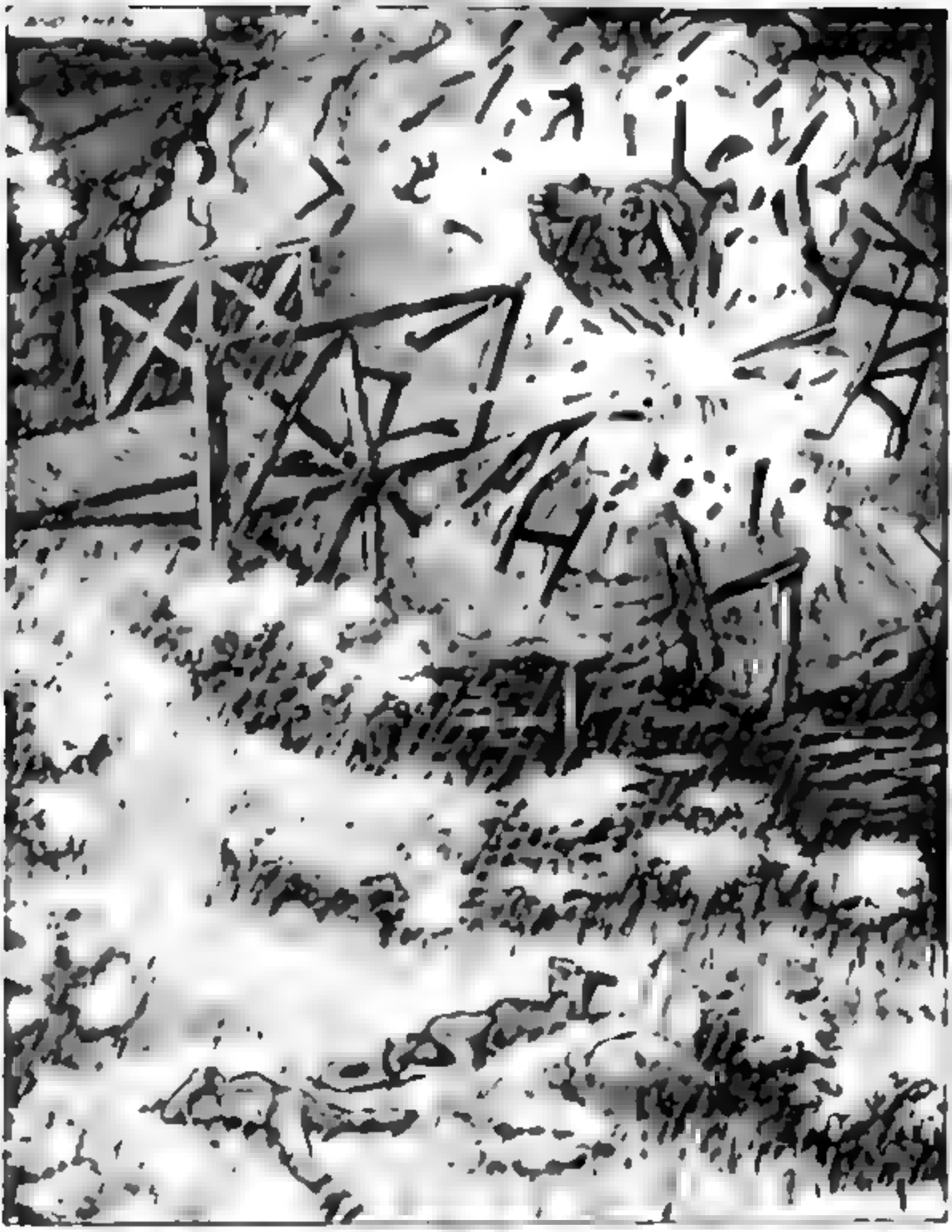
CURSE IT ! IT MUST WORK - IT MUST !

[illegible] OF JASON MA[illegible] . .

LEAVE HIM, LAD — GRAB YOUR GUN, THE JAPS ARE ALMOST ACROSS THE BRIDGE!

THE JAPS HAD ALREADY REACHED THE CHARGES AND WERE TEARING OUT THE WIRES THOMAS FLUNG HIS USELESS EXPLOSIVES ASIDE AND HE AND BALDOCK TOOK THEIR GUNS.
YOU'RE TOO LATE! TOO LATE!
HE'S MAD DAVID BOY! COME ON! WE'LL TAKE AS MANY OF THE BLIGHTERS WITH US AS WE CAN!
AND SO DAVID THOMAS AND BALDOCK WALKED TOWARDS THE BRIDGE . . .

AND EVEN AS THEY DID SO, THERE WAS A GREAT, SEARING FLASH OF LIGHTNING. THEY SAW COLONEL JASON MALGORE WRITHE CONVULSIVELY IN A BALL OF LIGHT – AND THE INSTANTANEOUS FLASH OF THE LIGHTNING ALONG THE WIRE TOWARDS THE WET, STEEL BRIDGE . . .



BATTERED BY THE FORCE OF THE EXPLOSION, MINDS REELING AT THE ORDEAL WHICH THEY HAD SURVIVED, SERGEANT BALDOCK AND CORPORAL THOMAS TURNED THEIR BACKS ON THE WRECKED MASS OF METAL WHICH WAS HALF-SUBMERGED IN THE SURGING TORRENT THAT THE RIVER HAD BECOME.

THE VILLAGE WAS DESERTED AS THEY HAD LEFT IT — *EXCEPT THAT BY THE BAKERY THEY FOUND THE DEAD BODY OF THE BLIND OLD MAN!*

BEEN DEAD ABOUT THREE HOURS! LUMME, THAT'S A STRANGE THING!

I NEVER WAS QUITE SURE THAT THE BODY ON THE BRIDGE WAS HIM. DO YOU REMEMBER, SARGE, HE SAID TO YOU, YOU'LL WALK OVER LAMBETH BRIDGE — OVER HIS DEAD BODY.

YOU KNOW, DAVID, I'LL DO THAT! MAYBE I'LL BE GOIN' 'OME ON BLIGHTY LEAVE YET...

SERGEANT BALDOCK STEPPED OVER THE DEAD BODY OF THE BLIND OLD MAN — AND THEY SET OFF THROUGH THE JUNGLE TO TRY TO REACH THE BRITISH POSITIONS.

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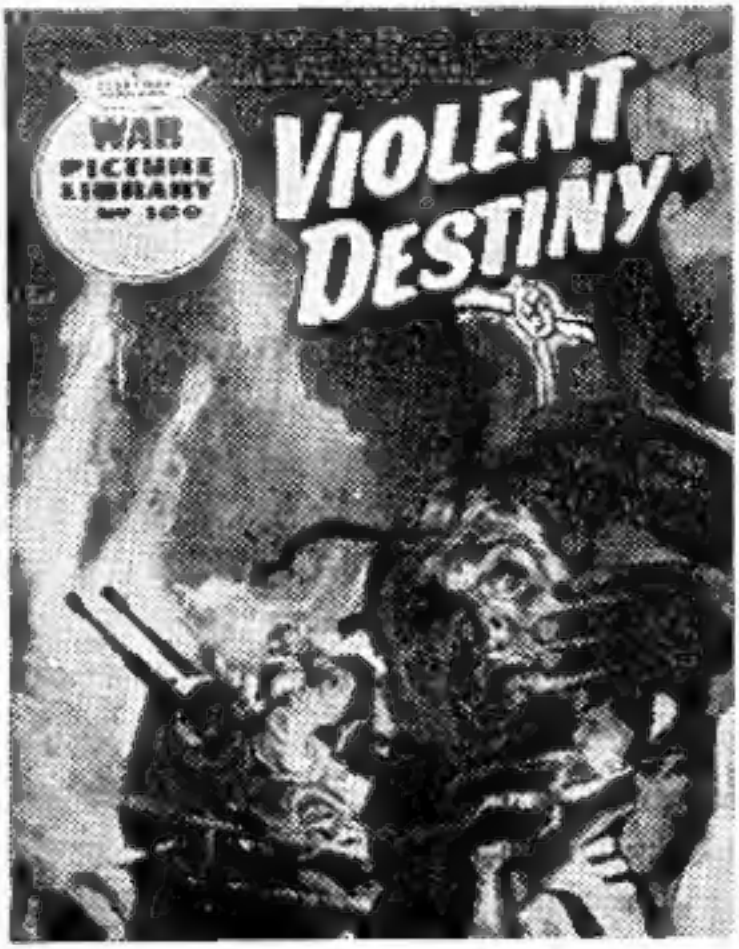
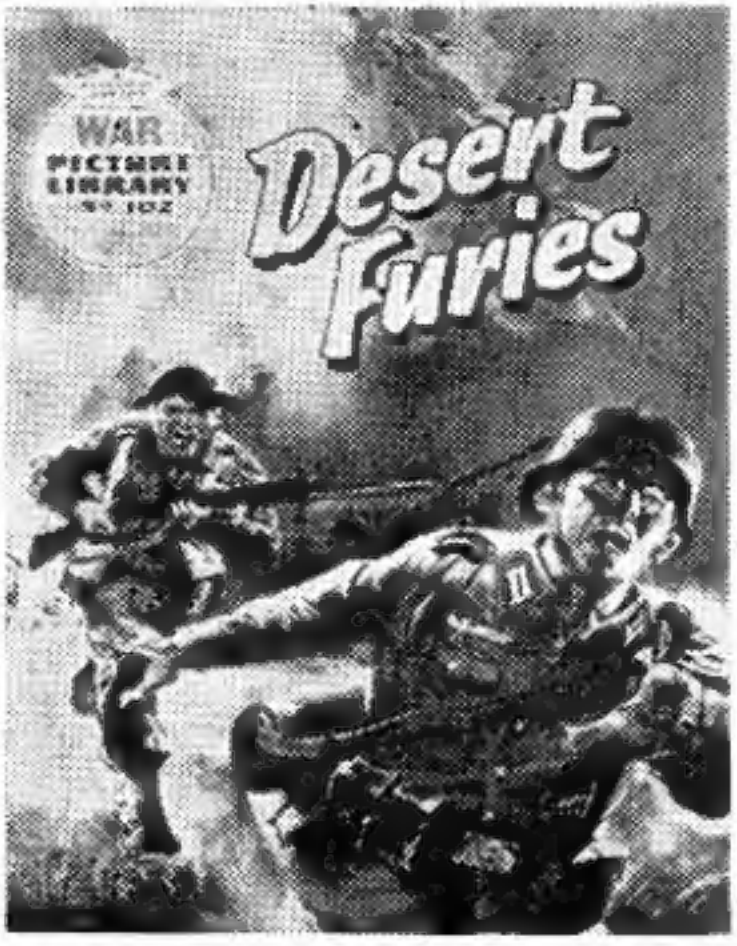


Every man has a price he will pay for freedom—sometimes it is his life !

No. 102—DESERT FURIES



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